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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[A DANGEROUS BEAUTY.]

HELEN'S DILEMMA.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SIR RUPERT had awaited an answer to his letter with no little anxiety. He had paced his room from end to end whilst his Mercury was away.

His watch lay before him on the table, and he consulted it eagerly every five minutes. Strange to say, his messenger was not more than an hour late, in his opinion, when he heard his welcome ring.

We, who were behind the scenes, know very well that the said retainer had done his errand with all reasonable speed.

"But where is the letter?" said his master, impatiently, gazing incredulously at his empty hands.

"There was no answer, Sir Rupert," replied the groom, respectfully. "Miss Despard came down into the hall, and said so herself."

"Miss Despard—how? You did not send the note up to her?" inquired his master, quickly.

"Oh, no, sir; but she took it up herself, and she brought down the message, and said as how Miss Brown said there was no answer."

Griggs was Sir Rupert's factotum. He accompanied his master everywhere, from Constantinople to Cargew, and he knew all about his master's flirtation with the governess.

Oh, yes; he had his eyes in his head, he would have told you; and how the governess, who was certainly a very good-looking young woman, turned out to be an heiress with thousands and thousands of pounds! It was like a fairy tale; but Mrs. Despard's maid declared that it was gospel truth!

Well, he, Griggs, had no objection to the match. He was getting pretty sick of wandering about, and he thought it quite time that his master was settled.

He was the more confirmed in this idea by the fact of there being a very tidy little girl—a gamekeeper's daughter at Cargew—who would make no opposition if he asked her to be Mrs. Griggs. So, you see, that he had a kind of personal interest in getting his master married.

He had felt instinctively that there was

something in the wind by the way Sir Rupert had given him the note, and told him to be sure and bring an answer; and Parsons had told him that Sir Rupert had had no dinner! had sent an excuse to Captain Torrens at the last moment!

Well, as far as he was concerned, he would not lose his dinner nor his beer for the best woman that ever stood in shoe leather!

"Then you did not see Miss Brown, Griggs?" said Sir Rupert, who could hardly realize his disappointment.

"No, Sir Rupert; she were up in the dressing-room. She never came down. I never set eyes on her, but I heard her singing."

Singing! This was a cruel piece of gratuitous information. With a hasty wave of his hand Sir Rupert dismissed Mr. Griggs, and sat down to collect his scattered thoughts.

Firstly, had Helen been revenging herself for the past? Had she feigned a spurious interest, a mock forgiveness, in order the more cruelly to dash his hopes to the ground?

She was a born actress—she certainly was! How well she had played the rôle of governess!

how well she fulfilled her part now of the rich heiress—the great beauty!

Nothing could be easier for her than to assume the little rôle she had played in the shady walk that very afternoon! Acting was her spécialité!

She had assumed an appearance of more than friendly interest; she had blushed, and trembled, and hesitated! Bah! it was all put on—it must have been!—when she sent no reply to his letter—a letter conveying the outpourings of his heart, his humblest submission, and his entreaties—not even for absolute pardon, but for just one line to take away with him to say that when he returned he might dare to number himself among her friends!

She sent no answer—not even one word, but went to the piano and sang!—sang, doubtless, a loud psalm of triumph, a kind of “*Io Triompho!*” over her credulous and miserable victim!

This was one view of the matter, and a very unpleasant one. There was another that presented itself in its turn before his mental vision—could Blanche the fair have been false?

Could she have intercepted his note or Helen's for her own private ends?

But no! He put the idea from him with scorn. He actually blushed to think that he could have dared to impute such a vile action to any woman—and, worse still, to his own cousin!

Then there was still one other alternative, and that was the pleasantest, and for this reason he dwelt on it the longest. Helen might have had no time to reply—probably the drawing-room was full of guests. That would account for her singing. She would write the letter in her own apartment, and it would come to him by the early post.

It was curious that they should both build their speculations on the early post; and they were both painfully disappointed, as we already know!

The next afternoon Sir Rupert was at sea, was steaming down the Irish Channel on board the *Chimborazo*. As the coast of Wales receded from his view he felt an odd, curious pang of regret.

He was deliberately putting the seas between himself and Helen; and already the salt water had worked a change in his feelings! Too late he regretted that he had not stayed at home, braved Torrens's wrath, cried off at the eleventh hour, and gone in person and had a face-to-face interview with his fickle, former fiancée!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

It was a lovely early autumn morning when Sir Rupert and his friend steamed out of Southampton harbour on board the *Chimborazo*.

The *Chimborazo* was a favourite steamer, and carried a number of passengers, chiefly Spanish and Americans, and not a few Brazilian beauties, returning from a round of sight-seeing in the old world; but the ladies found Sir Rupert Lynn strangely cold and unsympathetic, and curiously indifferent to the charms of the fair sex (for such an exceedingly handsome young man, with such undeniable openings for making himself agreeable).

His looks belied him. He was taciturn; he was morose; he preferred spending hours in company with his own thoughts and smoking dozens of cigarettes, to endeavouring to beguile the sunny days in pleasant society.

Captain Torrens was more amenable, and appeared only too glad to make the most of the golden opportunity. He talked, he told stories, he promenaded the deck, he played cards and dominoes, he sang, he flirted, and made himself very popular with more than one dark-eyed senorita; whilst his companion spent most of his time sullenly smoking, leaning his elbows on the bulwarks, and gazing moodily on the dark blue horizon, and was voted a bear!

At St. Thomas they changed steamers, and

a few days later they are really approaching the warm shores of South America. The remaining hours are devoted to packing, making tender promises of meeting or writing, to paying the steward's bills, and to discussing the merits and demerits of various rival hotels.

The harbour of Rio is one of the largest and finest in the world, and looked its very best as the vessel slowly steamed up the river in the white tropical moonlight.

Soon they had cast anchor, and were besieged by a cloud of noisy boats, clamorous for passengers—boats embarking dark, swarthy men in white clothes and wide palmetto hats, who talked sonorous Spanish and animated Portuguese, who came to greet and welcome various señors and señoras.

One of these gentlemen claimed Captain Torrens as an old friend. This was by no means Captain Torrens's first visit to the Brazils; and when he and his companion had collected their baggage he carried them off in triumph to his villa in the neighbourhood of Rio.

He was Señor Carvalho, one of the working partners in the Donna Bianca silver mine, and hospitably insisted that (at any rate for the present) Captain Torrens and the other Ingleses would make themselves at home at Santa Catherina—the name of his very magnificent country house.

Señor's family consisted of his wife, two unmarried daughters, and one son; and Sir Rupert, when he had got the throbbing of the engines out of his head, and had a long night's rest, could not refrain from endorsing Captain Torrens's encomiums, and admitting that they had fallen on their legs, and found an admirable billet!

The dwelling, of its kind, was undeniable; their apartments combined coolness and comfort; the ladies of the house were graciousness itself.

Santa Catherina was a large, green-shuttered, flat-roofed, white house, built round a colonnaded courtyard in the good old Spanish fashion, and surrounded by fragrant groves of orange trees and bananas.

The lower part of the villa was screened from public gaze by broad, latticed verandahs, which also ran round the interior of the courtyard, over which masses of glossy-leaved creepers, and scarlet, white, and purple passion-flowers tumbled in wild profusion.

Señor Carvalho and Captain Torrens have gone down into Rio on business. An hour ago they rode down the steep, white road mounted on two handsome mules, and Sir Rupert is left behind.

Senorita Mercedes and Senorita Inez have promised that they will do their best to entertain him, and he is in good hands.

They are both exceedingly handsome girls, of the Spanish type, with black hair, indescribably graceful movements, and splendid dark eyes—soft and melting—girls who have been educated at a convent in Paris, and who speak the most charming broken English; and even Sir Rupert is obliged to admit to himself that nothing can be prettier than the picture on which his eyes are resting.

Senorita Mercedes is slowly swaying to-and-fro in a grass hammock, which is hung between two of the white pillars of the verandah. It hangs so low that, with the aid of a tiny silken-shod foot, she is able to keep moving, and slowly fans herself as the long, slender hammock sways to-and-fro with a kind of rhythm to her sister's guitar. Her sister, who is sitting in a very low basket-chair, and accompanying herself in a charming little Spanish ballad—a ballad that goes with a most taking time and tune, and that seems to be devoted to the heart-hunger of some hapless donna in distant Castile.

The two young Spanish-Americans are not in the least bit shy; they are prepared to ride with, to sing to, to flirt with, their father's foreign friends.

The dark one is of a type quite unknown to these fair daughters of the south. He is pro-

occupied although he is polite—he is unresponsive—he fails to understand the language of the fan, and, more amazing still, the language of the eye.

They have settled between themselves that he has a love affair—some ice-hearted, fair Inglesa in the background. This alone will amply account for his extraordinary reserve and self-command.

He has been with them ten days. He has sung with them, danced with them, ridden with them—he is a magnificent horseman, even their brother Carlo admits that—and he has not once allowed himself to be inveigled into the gentle mazes of a flirtation.

He might make himself pleasant—they don't want to marry him. *Madré de Dios!* he is a heretic and a foreigner! But why is he so persistently silent, and grave, and glum?

(Ah! Miss Blanche Despard could tell them the reason.)

Four months later, Sir Rupert is riding once more through the streets of Rio, steering his horse through crowds of gaudily-dressed negroes, clamouring fruit-sellers, and discontented looking half-breeds. You would never recognize him, but would take him for a Spanish gentleman, with his bronzed face, his black beard, sombrero and poncho! Herida a magnificent black-brown horse, and is conversing eagerly and cheerfully with his friend Captain Torrens. Captain Torrens has not borne the alteration so well; his beard is thin and irregular, and his light blue eyes stand out with quite a comic expression from his dark, mahogany face; they have had a most successful trip—business and pleasure have been happily combined—they have seen the mines, they have crossed treeless plains giving pasture to herds of wild cattle; they have been hospitably entertained at many a lonely and out-of-the-way hacienda; they have traversed vast forests of caoutchouc trees and mahogany, and shot the implacable jaguar—the hideous alligator—the harmless humming-bird—and now that labour's o'er are about to rest and relate their adventures in the bosom of the family at Santa Catherina. After five months' roughing it—far from the haunts of civilization—Sir Rupert is undignifiedly pleased to see his two pretty Spanish friends again, and feels that on a former occasion he was truly and stupidly indifferent to their charms.

Certainly they have nothing to complain of now. He seems disposed to make amends for his past unsociability, and they confess to each other that he is a most charming and delightful cavalier. Mercedes has an adored lover, who looks solidly on the handsome Englishman, and has given her unmistakably to understand that her enthusiasm must be cooled! Inez has several declared and undeclared admirers; but, partly to pique them and partly to please herself, she no longer receives their compliments and flowers with gracious and impartial favour. No; all her smiles are given to the new arrival, and there is a good deal of sonorous swearing, and one or two very ugly threats among the senorita's circle of discarded admirers. Where is the duenna all this time? naturally occurs to the reader's mind. Senora Carvalho filled that post herself; but she was easy-going, extremely indolent, and incredibly fat, and left her daughters a good deal to themselves. How could she be expected to climb the roof moonlight nights and gaze at the stars with Inez and Senor Rupert? Could a woman of her age and years be asked to take the saddle and accompany them for miles into the country? At dances it was different; and the padre, her husband, had a high opinion of all Englishmen—they were to be trusted; and no one could look into Senor Rupert's dark eyes and believe for a moment that he was anything but a mirror of chivalry.

There is a good deal of pleasant intimacy induced between two young people by stargazing and guitar-playing; and Sir Rupert, thanks to Inez's instructions, was now quite an accomplished performer. He liked and admired his fair teacher immensely—indeed

once or twice he had asked himself if liking was not too cold a term for his feelings? She was lovely in her own style—white, brilliant teeth, magnificent eyes—and what a walk and what a figure! But he shuddered when her mother's proportions came before his mental vision—and the *madre* had been a great beauty in her day! Inez, though very bewitching and very beautiful, was shallow and ignorant; her education did not extend very far beyond dancing and guitar-playing. She resembled some brilliant tropical flower, who would bloom and flourish in her own country; but, transplanted to cold England, how would it be with her? How would the half-educated, volatile Brazilian accustom herself to high-bred, highly-polished, highly-inquisitive English dames? Then, too, she was a Roman Catholic. No, no; it was not to be thought of—it would never do! Charming as were their rides and their music lessons, he would be glad when Torrens had completed his business, and they could once more set their faces towards their native land.

And the fair Inez? Alas! she had been hoist with her own petard. She had meant that the *Senor Ingles* should fall madly in love with her, and lo! the cases were reversed. She was distractedly in love with him. The bare idea of his leaving Rio—leaving Rio without her—threw her into a frenzy of despair. Sir Rupert had tried to blind himself to this change in his pretty friend; he told himself that flirtation was the very breath of her nostrils, to a girl like Inez—that she really did not care a straw for him, nor he for her. True, her eyes told a very different tale; but that went for nothing with a Brazilian beauty. However, her eyes were shortly supplemented by her tongue, and she became not only exacting, but jealous and arbitrary. She could not bear to see him speak to any other lady—not even her own sister! To walk with, dance with, sing with, another girl, caused a stormy and tearful scene of remonstrance. Certainly things were becoming very unpleasant for Sir Rupert Lynn! He had never declared himself in any way, and yet the *senorita* seemed to consider him her exclusive property, and treated him entirely as an accepted suitor. The phlegmatic *senora* had been asking pointed questions about his relations—his family—his means? Surely she never seriously entertained the idea that he wished to carry her daughter across the seas, and introduce her to his people as Lady Lynn?

Sir Rupert was, if anything, too sensitive and too chivalrous; he could not bear to give pain to a woman—he shrank from administering a rebuff to his beautiful young hostess.

What was the most delicate neutrality on his part—what was absolutely demanded by common politeness—the sanguine Inez accepted for acquiescence, if not actually a warm reciprocation of her feelings.

These *Ingleses* were a cold-blooded race, she said to herself—they could not love like the people under the line, but by all accounts their love lasted longer.

Affairs soon came to a crisis. Sir Rupert could not blind himself to the fact that some sort of storm was brewing after an interview that he had with his fair friend one tropical afternoon.

They had been a portion of a large riding party to an old deserted hacienda about ten miles away.

A very merry dainty meal had been discussed in the grass-grown garden, and at its conclusion every one had roamed about the place—some into the gloomy, shattered house, some into the courtyard, some further afield.

Sir Rupert and Inez were among the latter. They sauntered down mossy walks, down broken steps, and finally came to anchor under a wide-spreading tree, that seemed almost to grow into the boundary wall.

Seating herself suddenly, Inez said,—
"Is it not odd that this place is shut up? No one will live here."

"And why not?" inquired Sir Rupert, looking back up the garden and surveying

the premises. "Ghosts, or the evil eye?" laughing. "It has been a fine place in its time!"

"Oh, you may laugh!" returned Inez, with a pout, "but there are ghosts, and there is an evil eye. Fernando Sandello says that that house"—nodding her head—"has such a bad name that although it is so near the town and so cheap no one has lived in it for twenty years! People have tried, but a week has been enough for any one—sometimes one night. Hush!"—with a start—"what is that moving among the bananas?" seizing her companion's arm, convulsively.

"Nothing but the wind. You are full of superstitious fancies. What's the wonderful story about the house? Believe me that the ghosts are nothing more or less than rats."

"Are they?" she exclaimed, indignantly. "You would not say that if you were to see them!"

"Then—are there more than one?" he asked, with a smile. "In England you never see more than one at a time!"

"There are two there," she returned, with deepest gravity, nodding her head towards the grey, weather-stained building, "a man and a girl. He murdered her—stabbed her. He was jealous."

"The brute! I hope he was hanged!" exclaimed Sir Rupert, poking up some weeds with the end of his riding cane.

"Ah! you English don't understand what jealousy means—you make no allowance."

"I make no allowance certainly for any man who could murder a defenceless woman," replied Sir Rupert, emphatically.

"Not when she had given him cause for jealousy?" inquired his fair companion, with wide-open eyes.

"Not even then could I understand it!" he replied, with unmovable countenance.

"Well, I can," she replied, fiercely. "I myself could kill any one who came between me and my love." Then reaching for a pomegranate blossom, which she held to her lips, she added, after a pause, in a lower, softer key, "For instance, I could murder any woman who dared to come between me—and you!"

This was certainly a very startling announcement, but it fell in quite the most natural manner from the *senorita's* pretty red lips.

Sir Rupert removed his wide-leaved sombrero, passed his hand across his forehead, and looked uneasily at his companion.

"I could be jealous, I can tell you!" she proceeded, in a confident, half-boastful tone. "Father Pedro tells me that I have a devil within me, and though you might not think it, Rupert, I am sure I have at times. You can't think how I felt at that bal masque when I saw you dancing so often with Carmina Salvani. I felt inclined to take a knife and stab her," she concluded, in a tone of angry conviction.

"Of course you are joking, you never felt anything of the kind!" said Sir Rupert, gravely; but as he looked down into the dark orbs beside him he felt a conviction that they were the windows from which a fiery, implacable nature looked forth—that in the fair bosom of the slender Spanish girl in the grey habit, who was leaning her back against the old tree, and looking straight up into his eyes, there was a large supply of incandescent lava, which might some day or other burst forth and carry all before it.

"Tell me," she said, abruptly, laying her hand on his arm. "Did you ever love a girl in your own country?"

This was indeed a crucial question, and her companion changed countenance beneath the eager scrutiny of her questioning eyes.

"Ah! I see you did! What was she like? Who was she? What came between you?" she asked, eagerly, in her own tongue.

For some seconds she received no answer. Sir Rupert's gaze was fastened on the horizon, and there was a fixed resolve in his look that the fair Inez failed to interpret correctly.

"Did she prove untrue?" approaching him and laying her face sympathetically on his arm.

"Yes," he answered, shortly, drawing his arm away by a brusque movement. "She—but never mind, why should we speak of her?"

Then after a long pause the *senorita* spoke again.

"Is it true what Captain Torrens told me this morning—that—that—you are anxious to go home—to go back to England?" she asked, in a curious voice.

"Yes, we have overstayed our time as it is. We really must make a start soon."

"And is this the way you can talk—must make a start soon, are anxious to go, when you know you will be leaving me behind? Oh! how can you?" suddenly bursting into a storm of sobs, and simultaneously casting herself into his reluctant arms. "If you go and leave me you will break my heart!"

Sir Rupert now found himself in a very embarrassing situation. What in the world was he to do with this girl who had thrown herself into his arms and declared that her heart was breaking? He must speak out, and at once.

"My dear Inez," he began, in a tone of gentle expostulation, "you don't know what you are saying; you are overwrought, you are not yourself," trying to disengage her, and trying in vain. "We are good friends, and we have spent a very pleasant month in your father's house, and I shall never forget all your hospitality and kindness; but when you say that you will break your heart at my departure I know that—that you must be joking."

"Do you mean that you don't understand me?" cried Inez, drawing suddenly back and glaring at him with blazing eyes and the air of a young Pythoness. "Do you mean to tell me that you do not love me? answer me!" with a stamp of her foot.

"I have a very sincere regard for you as a friend, but—but—why should I deceive you. I do not love you. All that sort of thing is over for me. I can never love twice."

"Then, Santa Dios! what is to become of me?" cried his companion, clasping her hands together in an agony of despair. "Why did I ever see you? why did you make my soul your own? 'Madre adorata!' cried this excitable young lady, 'I shall go mad! I shall die!' and without a second's warning she cast herself prone in the long grass at his feet in an utter abandonment of misery, and in a paroxysm of unutterable grief.

Far from being proud of his conquest, her companion felt a horrible quail of pain and humiliation to think that this untutored daughter of the south, this child of unrestrained emotions, should so far forget her womanly instincts as to fling her heart and herself at the feet of a man undesired and unasked.

The sobbing *senorita*, far from melting him to tenderness, simply overwhelmed him with repulsion and shame.

However, he lost no time in raising her and replacing her in her former seat, and soothing her by all the means in his power.

When her long drawn sobs and gasps had somewhat subsided he spoke to her very seriously and earnestly.

In a few words as possible he stretched the outline of his own disastrous love affair. He gave her his confidence unreservedly—told her how he had doubted and cast off his only love, and that now she in return had now abandoned him.

"But I can never care for any one else," he proceeded, resolutely, never! I only wish could with all my heart, but it would be useless to try. If I were to endeavour to forget her in making love to any girl her face would always come between us."

"Then she must be bad—she must!" cried Inez. "She must hate the evil eye. She won't marry you herself, nor let you marry anyone else!"

For fully half-an-hour Sir Rupert talked to

his unhappy companion—talked to her like a brother—talked common sense; and at the end of that time, thanks to his eloquence, his air of firm resolution, and his absolute self-command, the fair Inez was fully convinced that the case was hopeless.

The chevalier at her side had bestowed every grain of his affections on a pale-faced English *donna*, and, as far as she was concerned, his heart was as hard as the marble steps at their feet.

Well, there was no more to be said—no use in striving with the impossible. It was cruel of fate—too cruel. This was the third disappointment she had met with—for Inez was a young lady of very inflammable disposition, and had twice before fixed her hopes on the unattainable.

Once these hopes had been centred in one of the Emperor's aide-de-camps—one in a charming French Count; but neither of her former lovers had been as irresponsible or as cold and as hard-hearted as this Englishman.

A few minutes later they were wending their way across the grass, down the shallow steps, and up the mossy walks through a tangled mass of lovely, neglected tropical shrubs and flowers, who were loading the evening air with their rich, heavy perfume, and in some places actually barricaded the narrow, overgrown walks.

The moon was up, and the party already contemplating a speedy departure, when Sir Rupert and Inez passed out of the garden wilderness into the moon-flooded court-yard.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SIR RUPERT, not unnaturally, avoided Senorita Inez Carvalho *en route* home. He fell behind as they entered a narrow track in the forest, and gradually drew back until he brought up the rear alone.

He was riding, with his hat off, at a fast pace, and buried in some not very agreeable reflections, when he was suddenly roused out of himself by finding that another equestrian was alongside of his horse—a man with whom he had a slight acquaintance (and one of Inez's former rejected admirers)—a Brazilian *pur et simple*, with a peaked black beard and narrow slits of black eyes placed very close together in a very thin, sallow face.

"I have to congratulate Senor Ruperto," he said, doffing his *sombrero*, and reining his horse in with the other hand—"on his conquest. How fortunate the cavaliero must think himself to carry away the affections of one of our Rio belles!" a certain *soupon* of rancour in his tongue.

"I don't know what you mean!" returned Sir Rupert, brusquely. "You must speak plainer!"

"The senor," returned the other with an evil sneer, "will doubtless understand me, when I tell him that I was behind the plane-tree this afternoon, and saw *all*!"

Sir Rupert for a moment could not find speech.

"Yes," he proceeded, glaring into the other's eyes, and bringing out each word as if it were a dagger, "I saw the senorita throw herself into your arms. I heard her offer herself and her love. I even beheld her at your feet!"

"If you did," returned his companion, boldly, "I am sure you are a gentleman, and will never again let what you have just told me pass your lips. I may rely on you, I know."

"Yes, you may rely on me!" responded Senor Pasco, in a peculiar tone.

"She was under a mistake—a delusion. It was a slight hysterical attack, and the sooner we all forget it the better," making a movement as though he would canter on.

"Not so fast, my gay cavalier!" cried the other, resting his hand fiercely on his rein. "You have not told me if you love the beautiful Inez?"

"What is that to you?" returned Sir Rupert angrily. "Why should we talk of her? What is she to you?"

"Everything! for I love her myself," replied Senor Pasco, drily.

"Oh! you do—do you!" in a somewhat lenient voice.

"Yes, and you have stepped in, gained her affections, and tossed them aside like a worn-out glove. For *this*," he added, with a slow and deadly smile, "I am going to give you a lesson—a lesson that will show you that gay young travelling Ingleses may not come here and gather and trample on an honest man's belongings. For *this*—raising his voice—"I am going to *kill* you!"

Sir Rupert was a man of iron courage, but he naturally put his hand on his holsters—they were empty!

"No, no! not in that way," readily interpreting the movement. "I do not mean to murder you—the duello will be just as efficacious. My second will wait on you to-night."

"But do you think that I am going to fight you, and to have Senorita Inez's name dragged into the mud? Do you think I am a madman?" demanded Rupert sternly.

"I think!" said the other, rising in his peaked saddle, and speaking with undecipherable scorn. "I think that if you are not a madman you are a coward—and take *that*!" dealing him such a sudden, heavy blow across the month that it caused him to reel in his saddle; and before Sir Rupert could recover, his late challenger had galloped down a glade, and was lost to sight.

After this insult there was no alternative. Sir Rupert would listen to no expostulations from his friend—who talked himself nearly hoarse that night, as he paced Sir Rupert's tessellated apartment from end to end.

"It is monstrous—the idea of going out with a sweep like that—the idea of fighting a duel in these days! Think of what every one at home will say! They will say you are *mad*—and that I was a criminal to permit it to take place!" with angry intonation. "Supposing you fall?—you are the very last of your family—the name becomes extinct!"

"Some one must be the last of a family sometimes," returned the last of the Lynns, composedly; "and I don't think it matters!" In fact, Sir Rupert's unusually calm was consumed by a sense of raging passion, and an insensate craving to wipe out the insult that had been offered him that afternoon.

"The *Cotopaxi* sails to-morrow, you know!" pursued his friend. "You might go in her. Why not? What's the good of risking your life for a mere—"

"Thank you, Torrens!" interrupted Sir Rupert; "I had no idea that you held such a high opinion of me, and of my courage! I am to turn craven—to run away from this black-guard into-morrow's steamer! It would be a disgrace to the name of Englishman, not to speak of the name of Lynns. I would ten times rather have my bones out *here* than live a long life under such a stigma. I would never know an hour's peace. I would feel like a beaten hound to the end of my days. Duels are exploded in England; but *here* we must do as Rome does. Fancy the agreeable notoriety I would gain if I were to be handed down to posterity as the Englishman who was challenged by a Brazilian—and who *ran away*! No, no! better be the last of my line than that! I feel that that fellow's blow is scorching into my very bone—that I shall never rest until I have had some redress!" he exclaimed, fiercely.

"And suppose you fall!" exclaimed his friend, angrily; "supposing that this time to-morrow we have buried you in the English cemetery!"

"Supposing you have!" replied Sir Rupert, quietly. "At any rate, you will have the satisfaction of burying a man of honour."

"And you are to fight with swords—and he is the most accomplished fencer in the country—he will spit you like a sparrow," continued Captain Torrens, gloomily. "He is as wiry and as agile as a monkey. The little brute!"

"You forget that I was in a cavalry regiment—and can fence a bit, too, Torrens," said his principal, mildly. "You must not give me over *yet*; and should I be wounded

to-morrow, Tor, I want you to promise me one thing?"

"What?" very impatiently, and with an exceedingly ill grace.

"Take me straight on board the *Cotopaxi*. There they have an English surgeon on board, and it will be all the same to me whether I am on sea or on land—it will be better than being laid up in an hotel—and whatever happens don't let me be brought back to Santa Catharina."

He shrank sensitively from being received on the footing of an interesting invalid and of being nursed to convalescence by the too appreciative Inez.

"I never met with such a cold-blooded, matter-of-fact fellow in my life!" returned Captain Torrens, indignantly. "Why need you run the chance of being wounded—if not killed—from a mere spurious sense of honour?"

And here he began all his arguments over again. The Brazilian was not Sir Rupert's equal; he was not even a gentleman; he sought the quarrel to gratify his feelings of injured vanity; and was Sir Rupert to fall the victim to the overbearing arrogance of a fourth-class Brazilian wine merchant?

However, he talked to the wind, his friend was deaf as the traditional adder; and just as the faintest streaks of dawn were glimmering above the horizon, they sallied forth in dead silence for the place of meeting. It was about a mile away, under the walls of an old white convent on the banks of the magnificent Rio Grande.

They rode along between palms and cactus, past dusty India-rubber trees and high walls and big gateways, till they came within sight of the rendezvous. They were the first in the field; it was a chilly, raw morning; a damp, white, cool mist still overhung the river and the plains like a gauzy pall or veil, soon to be dispersed by the bold young sun. In five minutes more the other party (which included a doctor) had ridden up, and the combatants were confronting each other in their shirt-sleeves, eye-to-eye, and foot-to-foot.

The Englishman was not altogether such an easy prey as Senor Pasco had reckoned on. True, he was immeasurably his own inferior, but he was tall and active, ready and cool; he lacked the wonderful dexterity of wrist that signalized the Brazilian, his cat-like lightness, his skill of feint, but he possessed indisputably a cool head, and a brave heart.

What would any of Sir Rupert's London friends say could they behold him now! The club *habitué*, the longer in the Row, the keenest in the first fight, the perfect type of a calm, sensible, self-contained young Englishman, standing here by the river in the misty morning air with the weapon of an adversary playing all round him like steel-lightning, and all because of a little dark-eyed coquette, for whom he did not care two straws!

It was all very well to say so, but what would Helen have thought had she been suddenly transplanted to the land of passion-flowers and diamonds and palms?

Senor Pasco had lost his temper; the calm, unmoved manner in which the stranger parried and stopped his most deadly thrusts, acting merely on the defensive, threw him into a white fury. He became wild, he became incautious, he became impetuous; and Sir Rupert, seeing his advantage, pressed home and gave his adversary a very ugly cut in the forearm.

It was first blood, and it acted as a charm on Senor Pasco. He became once more stealthy and collected; he resembled the jaguar of his own forests in creeping, and stealing, and springing; he cursed, he swore, he sprang here and there as though on wires, delivering each thrust with a blood-curdling oath. He wore out his unpractised adversary, and seizing his moment, with an exclamation of triumph buried his weapon in Sir Rupert's chest.

He did not wait to know if the wound was pronounced fatal. He merely wiped his sword,

cast one glance of exultant hatred at the figure on the ground, whose life-blood was fast ebbing through his white shirt-front, now ontrivelled in colour by his face, and, calling for his horse, assuming his poncho and sombrero, he lightly leapt into the saddle, and gaily galloped off.

The *Cotopaxi* did carry away the traveller, after all. Captain Torrens was resolute. He refused to listen to the combined entreaties, expostulations, and lamentations of the Carvalho family, and he bore away his friend in despite of a most animated resistance.

It was very likely that he would die. He was wounded in the lungs, and the ship-surgeon had but a very faint hope of his recovery.

Of course the deed was hushed up as much as possible, but the more it was hushed up the more it was talked about—talked about secretly, confidentially, and mysteriously.

Very various were the reasons assigned. After the first real cause was settled (a woman, of course)—the *Senorita Inez Carvalho*. Equally, of course, amazing stories kept floating about colonnades and verandahs. And if these stories could only have been confined to the Brazils it did not greatly matter; but why—oh, malicious fate!—did some side-wind carry the news to Europe—enlarged? Why was there a paragraph in a certain society paper? Why was it whispered over various pretty tea-tables, in more than one club window, "that Rupert Lynn—such a good looking fellow!—had got into a nasty scrape out in Rio about a Spanish girl; had been called out by her brother, and was badly wounded in the lungs, and lay at St. Thomas not expected to recover?"

Need you ask if this came to Miss Brown's pretty little shell-like ears? Of course it did!

(To be continued.)

THE Greek plays at Cromwell House, charming as they were, seem not to have given unmitigated satisfaction, for great discomfiture took possession of the learned professors and talented artists (whose time, efforts, and powers had been devoted to an accepted object) to find the edge of keen anticipation blunted, even before a first performance, by Sir Charles and Lady Freake issuing "at home" invitations for the full dress rehearsal to some hundreds of their friends. "Still they come!" was the exclamation, and most, if not all, of those present were well satisfied, though they must have grieved a little at not helping by purchasing guinea tickets, the aim and end of the King's College Professors. This intended kindness to society was cruel upon them, and would have come with better grace after, rather than before the event.

A DESIRABLE HUSBAND.—Choose a busy man—one who has plenty to occupy his mind and to talk about. It is the man with many interests, with engrossing occupations, with plenty of people to fight, with a struggle to maintain against the world, who is the really domestic man, in the wife's sense; who enjoys home, who is tempted to make a friend of his wife, who relishes prattle, who feels in the home circle, where nobody is above him, as if he were in a haven of ease and relaxation. The drawback of home life, its containing possibilities of insipidity, sameness, and consequent weariness is never present to such a man. He no more tires of his wife and children than of his own happier moods. He is no more bored with home than with sleep. All the monotony and weariness of life he encounters outside. It is the pleasure-loving man, the merry companion, who requires constant excitement, that finds home life unendurable. He soon grows weary of it, and considers everything so tame that it is impossible for him to be happy or not to feel that he is less unhappy there than elsewhere.

A LOST DELIGHT.

I wandered down shadowy, forest ways,
Where sunlight glancing through,
Thick twined verdure, fell in rays
On mosses beaded with dew.
Those teardrops wept by the sorrowing night
As I vainly searched for a lost delight.

I came where falling waters threw
Their tinted spray in the air,
In white foam wreaths for nymphs they woo
To place on their sun-kissed hair.
And in the song of those fountains bright
I caught the refrain of a lost delight.

I came to the shore of the treacherous sea
When stars trembled o'er its waves,
As they murmured sad and unceasingly
Their chant to the shells and caves.
And in that moan of the ocean night
Was an echoed chord of a lost delight.

I came to a silent, flowery dell
Where athwart may blossoms snow,
A sheet of moonlight radiance fell
In a wondrous opaline glow.
And there in the heart of a lily white
Was folded the form of my lost delight.

But only the form, the spirit had fled,
And I felt my search was in vain,
The flower still blossomed, the perfume dead
Could never rekindle again.
And only in Heaven, with ethereal sight
Shall I welcome the soul of my lost delight.

M. S.

BROWN AS A BERRY.

CHAPTER XX.

"BERRY! you have grown quite a woman!"

"And, Eve, you have developed into an Eastern princess—with house, gardens, and slaves all to correspond! It is such a bewildering transformation scene, that I am completely dazzled, and can scarcely believe in the old days at Sarchedon Villa, with Susan as *major domo*, and everything else as well."

Eve shrugs her pretty shoulders with a gesture of disgust.

"Those wretched days! How could we ever have endured them?"

"Necessity knows no law!" answers Berry, a little dryly; vexed at what seems like heartless forgetfulness of the many happy hours they had spent together, in spite of poverty and their other discomforts.

It is the morning after her arrival, and they are alone in the verandah after breakfast; while in the front of the bungalow an Ayah is carrying the baby, and a bearer is holding a white umbrella over its sleeping face. Anxious to turn the conversation, Berry asks for a nearer view, and Eve calls the woman to her, listening with gratified pride to the encomiums passed upon it.

"Your eyes, Eve, and your mouth and chin, Not a bit like Colonel Chester!"

"Not a bit!" answers Eve, complacently.

Certainly she has good excuse for the vanity implied, even if there be none for the lack of wisely enthusiasm.

Eve Cardell had always been a pretty girl—but Mrs. Chester, with her added womanly grace, and the new softness that comes into her face when looking on her child, is lovelier than ever—and Berry cannot find it in her heart to call her to account. She looks so fragile, too, and fair in the soft black gown she has donned this morning, in compliment to her sister's deep crape, after apologizing for the unmourning garb in which she had been discovered the day before.

"India is so different from England," she had said, with a faint blush of shame.

"It seems so," Berry had answered.

"And one has no near relations, whose prejudices must be respected."

"We were never burdened with them at home."

"Besides," continues Eve, in the same conciliatory strain, "it is too hot for anything but the lightest clothes. You will be converted in time!"

Berry smiles.

"I am not so bigoted. I will promise not to melt quite away in my black gown, for the sake of unholding the good old English manners and customs; and—" she adds, more seriously, "perhaps it is because there was so little love that I should not like one of the outward conformities of respect to be missing—in my case, at least."

"Ah, poor papa!" says Eve, with a sigh for she had been his favourite child, and consequently, had liked him best in return.

"Mem Sahib, shall I take baba?"

It is the Ayah who breaks into their conversation. She had been standing unnoticed by their side, as half unconsciously Berry has retained the child in her arms, soothing it to sleep again with a gentle, rocking movement.

Eve starts and looks round sharply.

"Yes, take him in. It is getting too hot outside!" she answers, hastily; and watches the woman out of sight with an evident air of relief.

"That Ayah—how I hate her!" she explains.

"It is a positive trial to have her near me. I distrust her so! Good, as she really is, and attentive always, I cannot conquer the strange feeling of repulsion that came over me when I saw her first!"

"But, Eve, if you feel like that, why do you keep her?"

"It is my own fault. I was staying with friends in the plains, and unfortunately mislaid a brooch—one that had been Margaret's, you will remember it—a silver spray of bells. In my first anger and distress I accused this woman of stealing it, and she was sent away. Well, a few days later, I found it caught in the lace of a bonnet I had worn; and afterwards, when I saw the woman again, in my remorse, at the injustice I had done her, I foolishly took her into my service, in spite of my instinctive dislike!"

"But she seems a good Ayah and fond of baby; she speaks English, too."

"For all of which reasons I do not like to dismiss her, having no real cause, and yet—and yet—"

"I do not like thee, Doctor Fell!" quotes Berry, laughing, and then grows grave again, as she remembers how she too had once before felt that same unreasoning dislike to, and distrust of, her sister's husband.

Yes, I suppose that is it. Now shall we go in?" And, laughing a little, Eve gathers her dark draperies around her, and moves into the bungalow with a careless grace that is utterly in unison with the beauty all around her: the radiant sky, the rustling trees, and the exquisite flowers, that are grouped and trailed all over the verandah with prodigal Eastern magnificence.

Berry follows her regretfully.

"He jests at scars that never felt a wound."

And as yet Berry cannot believe in the treacherous heat of an Indian sun, nor realise that each ray can conceal such deadly weapons against health and reason. She would like nothing better than to revel in that glorious sunshine. It is all so brilliant and beautiful—so unlike what she has seen before.

The valley that stretches down from their garden's edge looks so inviting in its possibilities of hidden flowers and ferns. The trees that grow down it, all gnarled and twisted, twined one with another in a close embrace, that is riveted by sprays of ivy and branches of wild briar; while in spots there is a touch of pale sea-blue among the universal green, as a luscious gum-tree rears its head in ambitious emulation of the clustering pines around. There is, too, at the bottom of the valley, half covered by the over-running jungle grasses that surround it, the

bed of a streamlet, dry now, but its course marked by a trail of gleaming glistening stone, white like marble and with the sparkle of a diamond here and there. The birds, too, with their changing colours as the light plays upon their plumage, are like moving gems as they dart to and fro among the flowers—and the flowers themselves are beautiful as only flowers can be when growing in such wild unpruned luxuriance.

Berry sighs and passes through the verandah door, where her sister's Ayah meets her and drops a servile courtesy. Brushing past her with something of the same instinctive aversion to which Eve has confessed, Berry enters the drawing-room hastily.

"The Ayah is outside; I thought you sent her in with baby," she says at once, and then feels half-ashamed of the raucous with which she has spoken. What has the woman done, that she should thus strive to get her into trouble? But Eve has forgotten her animosity and answers easily,—

"Baby has an Ayah of his own and a bearer; that other woman is supposed to be my maid, and is only an occasional worshipper at his shrine. Baby is a personage, you know, with a capital P."

"And baby's mamma is equally imposing. Who would have thought Sarchedon Villa was fostering such sybaritic tastes!"

Eve's smile is rather mirthless. She does not remember those trials that were of old, and the contrast between then and now has ceased to be glaringly striking. She looks so thoroughly to the manner born, so essentially a child of fortune, that Berry wonders at her own temerity in reminding her of those less prosperous days.

"Do you remember the dinner when Colonel Chester came for the first time? What an excitement that was!"

Eve is silent. Evidently she does not relish these reminiscences.

"And the pretty frock you wore at the farewell dance? You know you gave it me, and I wore it twice at the depot gaieties. I assure you it was most enthusiastically received."

"I dare say you looked very well," listlessly.

"They told me so," demurely.

Eve looks up a little interested now, and relieved that the conversation can be turned.

"Who told you so? Berry, have you a lover yet?"

"I am seventeen!"

The droll assumption of wisdom and womanly experience with which this is said, provokes Eve's laughter and something of her admiration.

"I see, I need not have asked. Tell me, though, is one more favoured than the rest?"

"What! do you want to get rid of me so soon?"

"My dear, don't be foolish. Tell me who it is?"

"How would you like to see me the wife of a leading member of the cottonocracy, a civic magnate unapproachable in the stiffness of my new unaccustomed magnificence, and rolling about provincial streets in a yellow chariot, that is at once the delight of little boys and a terror to those of the populace who have infringed the civic laws?" And Berry prances up and down the room, with an absurd affectation of grandeur and a well-simulated admiration for the costly skirts that are supposed to be trailing in her wake.

"That is nonsense, of course, or you would not jest about it!"

"That brilliant fate might once have been mine; and"—with a little sentimental air—"I am not sure that I was wise to let it elude my grasp."

"Was he such a good man, Berry?"

"The best I had known—then."

"But you have seen someone else since? You are too pretty to have had one lover only."

"Yes, there was one more."

"Only one?"

"One is enough, when it is the right one."

"Ah!—yes," with a strangled sigh.

"And this is my true sweetheart. The only one I shall have so long as we both shall live."

"That is an extract from the marriage service, surely? Pray who, what, and where is this hero of romance?"

She speaks rather sarcastically, and with a tinge of envy, remembering how the brightness was all swept out of her own young life by one hasty inconsidered act. But Berry, full of this new happiness of hers does not notice, and answers with dreamy tenderness,—

"He is the best, handsomest, and bravest man you ever saw. His looks are those of a god, as the saying goes, but I doubt if any gods ever had such deep blue eyes and raven hair; his manners and his actions are those of an admirable Crichton. He is a Captain of the — Lancers, and is stationed at Meer Meer. But he will come and see us soon, and you shall judge for yourself how incomparable he is, and what a lucky girl I am. Eve, I will never forgive you if you do not confess he is irresistible then!"

"But his name?" impatiently.

"His name is John Carew."

"Great heavens!"

Eve has risen from her seat and stands before her sister, flushed and discomposed with indignation.

"You are saying that as a joke? You will not really make me believe that you have condescended even to know that man!"

"Why," whispers Berry faintly, and in her consternation can say no more.

"You ask *why*? and yet you seemed indignant enough when I told you the history of his perfidy."

"You—told—me—the—history of his perfidy?"

"Have you forgotten how he deserted Margaret that you let him deceive you too?" asks Eve, bitterly contemptuous of what she deems her sister's unpardonable weakness.

"Margaret—deserted!" murmurs Berry, hoarsely, still incapable of anything but an echo in her horrible bewilderment.

"Do you mean to say you never connected the John Carew you knew with the John Carew I told you of that day?"

"I? No. How could you think it? I had forgotten his name even."

Struck by the weariness in the girl's voice, Eve glances at her hastily, and at sight of the small white face with the great grey eyes aghast and the red all faded from her quivering lips, feels a twinge of compunction. In her hot indignation she has spoken so cruelly, not guessing that it was only in ignorance that so heinous a sin had been committed against her sister's memory; now something in Berry's expression tells her that though the offence will not be condoned, yet the revenge will strike both ways, and the judge suffer perhaps even more than the judged. She stretches out her arms full of compassion and tries to draw her sister to her breast.

"Berry, my poor darling, what can I say to comfort you?"

But Berry pushes her aside, intolerant of sympathy that comes so far short of the sorrow. It seems as if she were grown a hundred years old, as, with beating heart but hot and tearless eyes, she escapes and flies to her own room. There, prone upon her bed, she lies all through the burning hours of midday, and passes alone through that experience of pain which is her woman's portion. The brilliant mocking sun outside is flooding the floor with golden lights, and through the window comes the heavy scent of flowers, the soothing sounds of happy birds and bees; but heedless of all alike she lies almost as in a trance, while the sweetest knowledge of her life dies out of it, as it seems, for ever. She does not even notice the flight of time nor answer when Eve in fearful faltering accents begs for admittance. This one day at least she will call her own—to blot out the past and nerve herself to meet the future bravely.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE monsoon has burst a month ago, and, after the first violence is abated, the rain falls gently, but persistently, pattering down softly on the hard dry earth, and healing with its cool sweet touch all that the sun has tried so hard to destroy. The trees have wrapped themselves in coats of moss, out of which tufts of feathery ferns are peeping shyly, scarcely believing yet in the flag of truce held out by their cruel enemy, the sun. Even the birds seem to have gained new life and sing with added sweetness and delight; and a dozen different shades of green gladden the jaded eye wherever it may rest. From the swaying pines comes a pure refreshing scent, and the ground is brown with its faded fallen spears. June has wept her heart out in a turbulent grief that will not be consoled, but July is smiling through her tears like a lovely woman repenting of her pain. The sullen clouds are parted for a time, and the eager sun shoots out its brilliant rays, seeking old, sweet summer haunts, and the flowers rear their drooping heads, drinking in fresh courage from his beaming smile.

Deep down in the valleys tiny streamlets leap gaily over the stones and break into miniature waterfalls as they meet resistance on their way. Each day as it comes discovers new beauties that nature, until then, had concealed, and the skies stretch over all, calm now and exquisitely fair.

To Berry the time has been marked by the pain she has crowded into it, the tears she has wept at night, and the smiles she has forced on to her lips by day. She is aghast at the strength of her own passion. It should have been easy to dismiss so unworthy a lover from her thoughts, and yet she finds herself dwelling upon the words he had whispered and the lingering touches of his hand with unpardonable tenderness, instead of only remembering to condemn.

Eve had tried once to reopen the subject, with no success. Berry had turned upon her with the fierceness of a young tigress.

"Leave me alone," she had said, wildly. "My love is my own and my pain. Do not interfere with either." And awed by the tragedy in her voice, which is too sublime to be ridiculous, Eve says no more.

Colonel Chester notices nothing. He had seen that Berry was grown more womanly, and her added quietness only confirms the correctness of his impression. Berry and he had been growing friends of late. Thrown upon their own society they had learned to like each other better; and their morning rides together have been the sole enjoyment the girl has allowed herself since she came; four months ago. Her mourning garb has been a plausible excuse for not joining in any of the station gaieties. The only visits she has made have been to the convalescent barracks, where some of the old regiment are quartered; and even these she has found disappointing, for the women removed from the pressure of want, after the manner of their kind, have become thriftless, and are more inclined for gossip than domesticity.

Eve too spends much of her time indoors. Her mornings are given to the baby; and in the afternoons, when the showers that have fallen through the day have cooled the air and made it fresh with fragrance, she is generally to be found on the verandah book in hand, or with Ronald May beside her wasting away the sweetest of the four-and-twenty hours.

At last she brings down upon herself Berry's expressed disapprobation.

"Why does Ronald come so often?" she asks, with something of her old abruptness.

"Because he wishes, I suppose; because we are old friends, and because he knows no one else here well," answers Eve, uncomfortably.

"There is Mrs. Lee-Brooke."

"Talking to her is as bad as reading the 'Personal Notes' in a society paper. Why should you wish him so hard a fate? You used to be so fond of Ronald."

"I like him still."

"Then you never 'tell your love.' He was wondering only the other day how he had fallen from your favour."

"I think him disimproved."

"Perhaps his prosperity has turned his head," Eve suggests, smiling.

"Prosperity?"

"Yes. Did you not know he had come into a fortune since he had been here?"

"No; I never heard."

"Well, it is a fact. He is rolling in riches now, and will leave the service soon. India does not suit him, and he was so ill in the plains that they gave him six months' leave."

"How unfortunate!"

"What—his prosperity?"

"Everything. His being here. Eve, I cannot forget what passed between you before, even if you can."

"I cannot!" And Eve's lovely eyes, dim with a mist of tears, lift themselves in mute agony to her sister's face. The next moment she breaks into a silvery peal of half hysterical laughter, at the horror there depicted.

But Berry cannot smile, she is too thunder-struck to even speak as the full enormity of Eve's confession conveys itself to her mind.

"You were not in earnest?" she gasps, at last.

"I was. I am still. Why should I deny it? It is my misery, not my shame."

"It is both. Oh! it is too terrible to be true!"

"I wish it were," answers Eve, utterly sobered now, turning away with a deep sigh, and yet feeling something like relief at having thrown half the burden of her guilty knowledge on another. Perhaps it is more in thoughtlessness than with selfish intent she has spoken, not guessing how much more heavily this will weigh upon her sister than herself. She is naturally so light-hearted, and carries life's cares with an *insouciance* Berry cannot emulate. To her, with her sensitive spirit, at once impressionable and slow to forget, it is positive torture to share such a secret. All day long she goes about with drooped eyes, not daring to meet the gaze of anyone, knowing what she does.

It jars upon her ear like a false note in music when she hears Eve talking carelessly on indifferent subjects as though she had not a trouble in the world. How is it possible she can ever laugh again, or touch the soft, innocent face of her child with such perjured lips?

When Colonel Chester comes in, very grave, and sterner even than his wont, she shivers apprehensively, dreading the worst. And her fears are not altogether groundless.

It had happened, by a strange coincidence, that that very afternoon, lounging in the assembly rooms, paper in hand, Colonel Chester had heard voices on the verandah, his attention being arrested by the sound of his own name.

"Mrs. Chester and her 'bow-wow.'"

He has mixed so little with his fellow men that he attaches no meaning to the word, and, innocently supposing that his wife's pug was the subject of discussion, would have thought no more of the matter had not the lady addressed answered, with an affected laugh,—

"I thought you never used slang terms, and what a shame to accuse Mrs. Chester of possessing anything so dreadful!"

A moment later they enter the room together, and, not even knowing him by sight, attach no importance to his presence there. Captain Burdett is at another table, languidly turning over the leaves of *Punch*, and Mr. Le Sage is at his elbow, chatting volubly over the events of the week. He is talking now of a station picnic that had been the day before.

"You ought to have been there, Burdett."

"Yes, I am so fond of such things—always," with a sarcastic smile. "Who was there to make this particular gaiety such a desirable one?"

"Oh! I didn't mean to say it was anything out of the way. There were the usual amount

of grass widows and bow-wows. I thought it was fun."

"The buoyancy of youth," observes Captain Burdett, laconically.

"What is a bow-wow?"

The question comes upon them both like a bombshell. The word, always vulgar and absurd, sounds doubly so dropping solemnly, as it does, from Colonel Chester's lips. Captain Burdett claps his hand over his mouth, and ducks his head to smother a laugh; but Lawrence Le Sage, less gifted with a humorous sense of the ridiculous, and standing more in awe of his chief, answers, hurriedly,—

"It's only nonsense, sir; a word they have out here for 'admirers of married ladies.'"

"Sort of fetch-and-carry dogs of purely Indian growth—quite indispensable to the climate, I am told," puts in Captain Burdett, still chuckling.

"Well, at any rate, they save the husbands trouble," adds young Le Sage.

"And the payment for these valuable services?" asks Colonel Chester, disagreeably, and with a whiteness about his lips that was not noticeable before.

"It is a debt of honour," answers Captain Burdett, meaningly; and Colonel Chester making no other comment, the subject is allowed to drop.

Long after the others have left, he sits there still, brooding over what he had heard until it becomes a positive nightmare to him. His mind, warped by previous unfortunate experience, takes so distorted a view of the case that he can scarcely bring himself to go home and look upon his wife's fair face again until he can know for a surety that it is not also false.

He had thought her above suspicion, and yet these perfect strangers have spoken of her lightly.

Can it be that he has been mistaken in her, and that she is not so cold to others as she is to him? A memory of old sweeps across his brain, so potent and full of misery that he can no longer remain inert.

He staggers to his feet and goes quickly from the room. The fresh air meeting him cools his heated brow, and dispels some of his most morbid fancies.

What seemed probable before now assumes impossible exaggerated proportions, and he can almost laugh at himself for his folly.

"Be thou as pure as ice and chaste as snow thou shalt not escape calumny!" These words, or words like to these, ring reproachfully in his ears.

India is proverbially the country of scandal; how could he listen for a moment to such idle words? How, even with unquestionable evidence before him, could he admit the possibility of his wife's untruth?

The last lingering doubt fades entirely from his mind when he reaches home, after a long aimless walk among the winding paths that cover the hills like a gigantic net-work.

Eve is in the verandah, seated in a perfect nest of trailing purple flowers, and cooing soft, unintelligible language to the baby on her knee.

She looks so womanly and sweet—so above his unworthy thoughts—that he breathes a deep sigh of relieved content, as he stoops and gently kisses her smooth, white brow.

Utterly reassured for the time he does not notice how Berry shivers, and moves away into the house, out of sight of what seems to her like a piece of bad acting, in which not even the performers can take delight.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Eve, have you ever regretted that you married me?"

Jealousy is certainly the most difficult of all demons to exorcise. Although Colonel Chester had successfully cast it away from him at first, it had returned, after a few days, like that other demon in the Scriptures, and brought with it (or, at least, so it seems to him) seven other devils worse than itself.

His mind had been swept clear of all other thoughts and feelings by the magnitude of that terrible suspicion, and so, unfortunately, there is ample room for doubts and fears to enter and take root.

A dozen times a day he finds new food for self-torturing conjecture, and, at last, though knowing well the futility of all such questioning, cannot refrain from asking for the truth.

"Eve, have you ever regretted that you married me?"

"Gracious, Alex! What do you mean?"

She has been sitting with her back to him at a small writing table, and now turns round and faces him with a start.

"What I say. Does it take so long to concoct an answer to my question?"

"I think you have no right to speak like that. It is an insult to suppose that I have any need to concoct a reply to anything you might ask!" with an indignation that is the greater because she feels she is not free from blame.

"I beg your pardon!"

He has put himself so palpably in the wrong that she might have evaded the subject altogether only that, with a woman's unwisdom, she cannot leave well alone.

"Why should you doubt me?" she says, with an angelic pout.

"Was I very unjust?" a little bitterly, and yet relenting, in spite of himself, at seeing her beautiful face wearing that expression of distress. So surely does woman's strength lie in man's weakness.

He comes forward and lays his hand on her shoulder.

"My darling, if I feared it was because I loved you so!"

Eve stretches out her plump white arms from which the loose, cool sleeves have fallen back, and looks at them with comical distaste.

"Are these the wasted limbs of a hapless heroine—a victim of despair? Am I long, lean, and unlovely, like a mediæval maiden whose lover (or whose dinner) has disagreed with her? Do I look unhappy, Alex?"

"You are all that is sweet and good and true. I was a brute to have doubted you for a moment!"

Her arms fall heavily to her side. Having succeeded in her intent to deceive she cannot rest content, but with characteristic inconsistency strives to undo what she has done.

"Alex, I am not worthy of you!" she murmurs, humbly.

"You said that once before at Sarchedon Villa."

Ah me! Those dear old days. Will their memory never leave her—never fade?

As he speaks there flashes before her mind's eye with kaleidoscopic brilliancy those coloured vials in the chemist's window opposite their home. All those horrors, too, over which she has so often shuddered, are now invested with an idealistic halo. She would give worlds to see them again!

For the instant it seems as though she had gained her wish, and in fancy she stands at the little rickety gate waiting for Ronald May. He comes behind her and lays his hand upon her shoulder, and she turns to meet him with a loving, eager smile only to encounter instead that other darkly frowning face which has come into her life like an adverse fate. Which was fancy? which is fact? She closes her eyes and then slowly reopens them.

It is her husband beside her, his fingers grasping her shoulder tightly, not in affection, but evident marital wrath.

"Is the past so sweet to you that you utterly ignore the present—and me?"

"Forgive me, I was in a dream!"

"So it appeared. It was a pity to awake you."

She turns back to the table without reply, taking up a quill and nervously playing with it to hide her confusion. Her apparent indifference maddens him still more, all the naturally wild untamed nature of the man breaking loose and showing itself in his livid colour and glowing eyes.

"Are you deaf?" he asks, fiercely. "Why cannot you speak?"

But Eve's cowardice is more moral than physical, and she does not shrink from his almost threatening gesture.

"Do you intend often to favour me with such scenes?" she asks, with quiet scorn.

"I intend to have an answer to my first question!"

Then you must ask me it again, for you have asked me so many questions this morning that I cannot call that particular one to mind."

"Do you regret our marriage?" he repeats, doggedly.

For a moment she hesitates. Shall she throw herself upon his mercy and confess all; fall from the high pinnacle on which he has placed her, and destroy the delicate fabric she has woven? The truth so long delayed would be no virtue now, but a needlessly cruel blow. Must she with her own hands thrust away all hope of her happiness and his?

It is with a feeling of something like the heroism of unselfishness that the falsehood falls from her lips.

"No!"

His face softens, and he moves a little farther away from her.

"I did not frighten you into saying that?"

"No!"

And then, again, with her usual buoyancy rising above the seriousness of the occasion, she adds, coquettishly,—

"But it was surely not the happiest method of propounding a sentimental problem? Confess you were a little like an amorous highwayman clamouring so loudly after 'my love or my life!'"

The dewy sea-blue eyes are raised to his fondly, and the lips are parted in a lovely mocking smile. What can he say in reply? He can only take her in his arms and shower caresses on the exquisite face that is declaredly all his own.

"Take care," she says, flushed and smiling still when he releases her at last. "Do not try to win a second wife with so violent a wooing."

"One wife is surely enough!" with a forced smile.

"More than enough, I should say, at a time; but, of course, I meant only in the event of anything happening to me. Some nice elderly woman I would advise you to take next time. Girls hate widowers!"

"Are you as prejudiced as most? Would you have refused me if I had had a wife before?"

"I think so; I don't know!"

"And if the knowledge only now came to you that it had happened so, would you leave me?"

"That is an impossibility which needs no discussion."

"We have talked so much nonsense to-day that a little more or less is of no account. Forget it all if you can."

His face is turned away, but from the nervous pressure of his hands that are holding hers, she knows he is deeply moved. Is it to banish the recollection of his first severity that he has been talking with such apparent purposelessness? Well, if he can jest while feeling so strongly, so can she. Her smile is as guileless as an infant, and as free from care when she answers, quietly,—

"I will forget everything except that I took you 'for better and for worse.' This is worse!"

But when she is once again alone the smile fades into nothingness, and she drops her head upon the writing-table with a lassitude born of despair. Her woman's wit has won the day, it is true, but at what a cost! So Berry finds her bowed and crushed with grief when she comes to summon her to luncheon.

"Eve, what is it? Are you ill?"

"Do I look so?"

"Yes."

"I am not surprised. I never shall be surprised at anything again."

"That is a weighty resolution. What has caused it?" smiling a little at her sister's

tragic tone. But Eve does not heed her questioning.

"I don't think I was ever remarkable for untruths when we were little children at home," she goes on, wistfully. "You don't remember, do you, Berry?"

On Berry's conscience the sins of her childhood evidently do not lie with any perceptible heaviness.

"I dare say we were all much the same!" she answers, easily. "I don't know that you were ever especially distinguished for either virtue or viciousness."

"I have not *always* been false, and only just now discovered it," persists Eve.

"My dear, come and lie down, and I will bring you your luncheon. You cannot be well to talk so strangely."

"I am not well. I am wretchedly ill and unstrung, but that is no answer to my question."

"I did not think you were speaking seriously."

"I was."

"Then seriously answering, I have never known you untrue except—except in one instance."

"And that?" faintly.

"In your marriage," answers Berry, gravely; full of pity, and yet obliged to condemn.

"And that is such a long falsehood," says Eve, wearily; "there seems no end to it, and never will be until—until—I die."

"Hush!"

"Why, child, you need not look so horrified. Mentioning my decease will not hurry it."

"Indeed, I hope not. Oh! Eve, what have you been doing with my favourite quill?"

"Spoilt it, I am afraid. Never mind, there are plenty more. I will keep this one in spite of its shaven and generally undressed appearance as a reminder of a very *mauvais quart d'heure*."

"Highly laudable of you, my dear, and very cheerful," observes Berry, grimly. "Why not have a death's head at luncheon on the same principle? It would be quite a chaste revival of the antique—and antique revivals are so fashionable now."

"By-the-bye, luncheon is waiting, I think you said. Shall we go?" says Eve, quickly, resenting the ridicule, and not having the spirit to retort.

"And what is worse—the baby. I heard his voice as I came in here, and he is crying still I think."

"I will go at once. Why did you not tell me before?"

"Your white face put everything else out of my head."

Eve has scarcely been listening to her excuse. A thoughtful look has come into her eyes and her brow is puckered in an anxious frown.

"Do you know, Berry, I sometimes fancy baby is not very strong."

"My dear, you fancy so many things."

"And am right in most. Heaven grant that in this, at least, I may prove wrong!"

She turns away sadly and goes from the room, leaving Berry to wonder whether, after all, she is not the happier of the two. The loveless life which lies before her is free from pitfalls; and had she not chosen it for herself before—before she knew? If she has no hope, she has also no fear, and the memory of what was, and the thoughts of what might have been, are sorrowful sweetness without alloy; not hers the blame.

CHAPTER XXIII.

As with most emotional natures, Eve's feelings lie only on the surface and are not deep as well. For a day or two she is penitent and remorseful, avoiding Ronald as much as may be, and spending most of her time near her baby's cot.

Then, like all other violent revolutions, it brings its own reaction, and she soon relapses into her former habits of indifference to anything but her lover's presence or his absence. The latter so seldom occurs that Berry determines to speak to Ronald himself, and appeal

to his manhood not to remain. Surely he will see the danger, and consent to go at once before it is too late, and the barriers are swept away that can never, never again be re-erected between the two.

Conquest would be as easy as it would be disgraceful, it seems to her; for Eve, strong enough once to put away the good and choose evil for her own, is only weakest woman now where Ronald is concerned.

Her headstrong will is broken and her love become so dominant a passion that nothing can long stand before it. Wifehood, even motherhood, is forgotten, for the subtle poison creeping through her veins has dulled her senses to all that is honourable and good.

Love so resisted gains in intensity and power, like a river pent, which for a time may be restrained and lie in enforced content, but all the while it is seething and boiling with impatience, until, wearied by its importunities, the dam breaks at last, then the water leaps from its fretting bondage, and floods the country round, uttering loud moans, that are perhaps protests against the ingenuity of man in breaking nature's laws.

And so with Eve. She fought so long against her ill-starred affection that now she can struggle no more, and is carelessly allowing herself to float with the stream.

It is so pleasant to let her lover linger at her side, whispering insidious sweetnothings, and she has been too long in that pleasure-loving Indian clime to be continuously asking herself whether it is also right. The best has been denied to her; she must even take what she can.

But if she is so quiescent, not so Berry. She has gained one concession from her sister, and had hoped that it might have been successful in its results. Putting aside the deepness of her mourning (and her own inclinations, which are even more sombre) she had begged Eve to go out with her into as much of society as the comparatively small station can afford, trusting that what remonstrance cannot effect distraction may. Besides, Eve has too much regard for the proprieties to scandalise them, and Berry's great object is to gain time by keeping them apart. This mad fancy can surely not last for ever.

After all her scheme does not get a fair trial; Mrs. Lee-Brooke by a chance remark precipitating affairs, and bringing them to a crisis.

"Your sister's friend, Mr. May," she had said, in speaking of him, and with so disagreeable an emphasis that Berry is terrified. What if already her sister's name is bandied about and made the subject of shameful gossip.

It is after this that she resolves to implore Ronald to have pity on both and go, but not for some time does an opportunity present itself of seeing him alone, and when it does she is so flustered and nervous at her self-imposed task that she is in danger of losing it.

It is at a garden-party, and all but themselves are engaged in badminton and tennis, all except Eve, who never plays these games, and is leaning back in an easy, low cane chair, talking to Captain Burdett. Ronald is watching her jealously, and with a haggard look on the face that was so bright and boyish once. He looks years older than he did in the far away time when Eve loved him first.

"After all, it is little more than a year ago," she says, aloud, following a long train of thought.

He starts. He had forgotten, or had not noticed her presence.

"I beg your pardon; what did you say, Berry?"

"Was I saying? I thought I was only *thinking*."

"Thinking of what?"

"Would you care to know?"

"Of course," politely, but with obviously little curiosity.

"Then you shall," she answers, sharply, vexed at his unconcern. "I was wondering how it was you are so altered."

"Am I altered? How?"

"In so many ways!"

"Mention one?"

"You are always with Eve now, following her about and haunting her like her shadow. It makes people talk. Why do you do it?"

"It is policy to be on good terms with your Colonel's wife. You cannot blame me for that," he answers uneasily, trying to take her home-thrust as a joke; but she shakes her head incredulously.

"And you come so often to see us," she goes on, feeling more courageous once the ice is broken.

"Is that a fault, too?" laughing.

"Indeed, I think so," gravely.

He turns, and looking into her serious eyes, sees something there that shows him she is in earnest—something, too, of veiled scorn that makes him refrain from further questioning.

"You would make a bad hostess, Berry," he says, with an uncomfortable smile. "When you marry shall you always tell your guests with the same inhospitable frankness that they are unwelcome?"

"I hope I shall not have occasion."

"You have none now!" hotly.

"I wish I could believe it."

Her sad solemnity silences him, and she goes on without interruption.

"Dear Ronald, I cannot bear to see you like this; to know that you are both unhappy—both wrong. I can remember when it seemed as if it might have been so different, but that is all over now, and I cannot stand by quietly without being false myself!"

"False to whom?" he questions nervously, digging his stick into the sandy soil with unnecessary vehemence, and tracing cabalistic forms and figures upon the ground as an excuse for his bent head. He dare not raise it, fearing self-betrayal.

"To Colonel Chester!"

"Ah!" with a deep-drawn sigh, and then suddenly: "Berry, who put this nonsense in your head?"

"No one. I know what I know," she returns with a grand magniloquence that would be amusing were not the occasion of its use so grave; "I know that you loved each other once, and fear that you do so still."

"You may answer for me if you like, but Eve—" He stops, and she is about to answer, when warned by his eager upward glance she refrains. If he has not already guessed her sister's secret, she must not be the one to tell it.

"Eve has her husband!" she supplements shortly. "You ought not to try to come between them."

He looks a little ashamed, and is going to reply when Laurence Le Sage joins them.

"How is it you are not playing, Miss Cardell?"

"I have no talent that way, unfortunately."

"Unfortunately, indeed. There is nothing else to be done out here," with a pitying smile at the surrounding pleasure-seekers, who are still vigorously sending shuttle-cocks and balls backwards and forwards with unabated enthusiasm.

"Then I may as well label myself 'useless,' and beg to be returned to my own country at once," says Berry, and laughs as though that would be no great hardship.

"Is it not delightful? Are you not enjoying yourself?" asks Mrs. Lee-Brooke, stopping for a moment beside them. "I think it is delicious here in the hills. I am getting quite gay, and am engaged for every day for a week. To-morrow we dine with you. Saturday there is the Club badminton, Sunday, church—"

"Do you call that an engagement?" asks Captain Burdett, having come up quietly behind.

"Well, no, not exactly," rather confused. "But it is a great thing to have an object for the day."

"A great thing indeed, provided it is for the day only, and is not your wife!" comments the captain, drily, as she passes on with a girlish kiss of her finger-tips in farewell.

"What a shame!" scolds Berry, merrily. "She is not so plain!"

"Is she not?" shrugging his shoulders.

"And I have heard you say you hated pretty women!"

"I hate ugly ones worse!"

"Which means a sweeping condemnation of all our sex!"

"Don't you deserve censure?" smiling.

"I don't feel particularly wicked."

"You look it!" meaningly. "It was to protect May that I came over!"

"Very good of you, I'm sure," says Ronald, absently.

"And in the meantime who is to protect Mrs. Chester? You have left her alone. Are you going back, or shall I take your place?" asks young Le Sage, with an air of chivalry.

"You go by all means, Laurence. She will be the gainer!"

But, after all, he does not linger long where he has elected to stay. He is never a lady's man; and although the two sisters are favourites of his, more especially the younger, even they have not the power to keep him for any time.

Directly they are alone again Ronald recommences,—

"Berry, what do you wish me to do?"

"To go away. It is the only honourable thing."

"I believe you are right; but it will be very hard. I have loved her so long and so well."

She is looking at him with such unsympathising eyes that he stops short in his rhapsodies.

"If you love her, you will leave her," she says, with sweet severity.

"It is so easy to talk, but not so easy to do. I tell you, my whole life is at stake!"

"More than that, Ronald—your honour," she interposes, gently.

"Yes, of course. Berry, I wonder if you will ever be in love?"

"Not likely. Why do you ask?"

"Because you are so cold. You would drive a man mad."

"I hope not," quietly.

"Do you know, Berry," he goes on reverting again to his own grievances; "I shall never forgive myself that I did not urge my cause more warmly. I ought to have pleaded again and again, until she *did* consent. I might have known a woman's 'no,' was often 'yes'; but I was such a proud, young fool."

I don't think it would have made much difference," answers the girl, meaning to console, but falling short of her object.

The sun is setting, and the snows are bathed in rosiest light as they stand out warm against a pale horizon; the sky is a mass of what would seem impossible colours placed on English canvas, and viewed by English eyes—an expanse of clear sea-green flecked with little golden spots and islets of blue from its palest, purest shade, to darkest indigo. And just where Phœbus sinks to rest a confused splash of crimson and purple as though he were leaving his royal robes behind.

"The King is dead, long live the King."

The moon is already rising in its stead, although in meeker majesty, shining coldly on the clusters of dark pines and the deep, damp valleys beneath. Slowly, slowly the richer brightness fades, and only silvery beams make radiant the gathering clouds; one by one the stars peep out, and twinkle happily. The grand snow-hills have ceased to blush and glow, and are perfectly white now, white and still like death.

"How one misses the twilight," says Eve in her soft young voice, as she comes up beside them, her light draperies floating behind her, and her feathery hat encircling her head more like a halo than a merely mortal piece of millinery.

"Let us go home," says Berry, quickly, seizing her by the arm, and hurrying her away out of Ronald's sight. What is the good of all her lecturing and common sense if it is to be upset in a moment by Eve's bewildering beauty. Love is always stronger than reason, and for faces less fair men have died and counted not the cost.

(To be continued.)

THE LILY AND THE ROSE.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"You must miss Greta terribly!" Lady Avanley said to Alice, with her most affable air, as they sat down to dinner the evening of the other's departure. "You seem to be wonderful friends now-a-days."

"Yes; I love her dearly," replied Alice cordially.

"I thought so; and am truly glad. Poor Greta has never had a friend before; and though (smiling) I felt disposed to be a little jealous of you in the beginning, I quite see now it is well she should have companions of her own age. But you can understand and excuse my feeling, Alice, I am sure, when I tell you that ever since your poor uncle's death Greta and I have been inseparable. When you are a mother yourself, you will understand."

"I understand now, Lady Avanley."

"Don't call me Lady Avanley, my dear. This was all very well when we were strangers to each other, but now I hope we are a little more, and you might remember I am your aunt. I shall never forget all your kindness to Greta. If you had been her own sister you could not have been more devoted."

"It was so nice to feel I could be of any use to her, aunt!" returned Alice, half shyly.

"That is right. How much nicer it sounds, doesn't it? I am quite glad we are alone, after all, for when Greta is here we are both so occupied with her we haven't time to think of ourselves."

Alice might have reminded Lady Avanley that they, too, had taken all their meals *à la carte* for over a fortnight, and therefore there had been plenty of opportunity of bettering their acquaintance had she wished. But she was so glamourised by the other's extreme graciousness—so anxious to believe that her former unfavourable verdict had been a mistake—she would not suffer herself to notice these little discrepancies, and responded brightly to her ladyship's advances.

Alice was in the hands of an artful and accomplished woman of the world; and Lady Avanley was bent on getting all she could out of her. The task was not a difficult one, considering the fascinating slyness on one side, and the youth and inexperience on the other. And then Alice was so grateful for what she called the other's interest in her she desired nothing better than to be confidential.

"You must have had a hard life at home," said Lady Avanley, later on in the evening. "I have comparatively small means myself now-a-days, and I know how harassing it is to have to look at every pound before you spend it, and try to mortify the flesh at every turn."

"But you see we lived entirely out of the world, Lady Avanley, and our wants were very moderate," Alice replied. "I never felt poor somehow, until mamma was ill—and then I did wish we were rich that I might be able to send for Sir William Gull."

"I don't suppose he could have done her any good."

"Dr. Ferguson assured me not; still it would have been a comfort afterwards to know everything had been done. When I lost her I lost my all."

"It was a great pity your father didn't try to make some provision for you."

Alice coloured at this implied reproach to her father, and answered quickly,—

"He would have done so—he often said as much—only that mamma's ill-health increased his expenses. She would not come to England, for fear she should die before she saw him again, and so he had to send her to the hills continually. I can't remember that for five or six years we were ever without a doctor in the house!"

"I suppose it was the climate that affected your mother's health."

"They said not. Mamma was ill when she went out."

"I don't mean anything unkind towards you, father, Alice, but I must say I think he would have shown his love better by leaving her at Aylesford. How could a delicate creature like that be fit to rough it abroad on a small income?"

"Mamma was willing to sacrifice herself for love of him."

"Of course; but he oughtn't to have allowed her. When a man really loves a woman he takes care all the sacrifice is on his side."

"She would go with him. I have heard her say so often. And I am quite sure she never regretted it. There was a very happy marriage. I never saw two people before who were so thoroughly in one heart and mind and feeling."

"In that case, it seems to me your father must have been ready to kill himself with anguish when he saw her suffering—through him."

"When husband and wife love each other they don't put the thing that way, aunt!"

"You seem to be very wise on such subjects, my dear," returned Lady Avanley, laughing. "I suppose your motto, like your mother's, is 'All for love, and the world well lost.'"

Alice hesitated for nearly a minute before she answered,—

"If I had to do without either love or money in my married home, I should elect to do without the money, of course; but I am afraid I should like a good deal of both, if I had my choice."

"Come, that is frank, at any rate, and shows me you are not a lacadaical, romantic girl!"

"I should hope not. Still I do think it very wrong to marry a man you do not love!"

"And I'll tell you the result of my experience—the experience of twenty years passed in the world, with very wide-open eyes. The most foolish thing conceivable is to marry for love. If it comes afterwards—as it generally does—well and good, for then it has a safe foundation and will last. But beforehand it is mere passion based on a dozen graces and virtues your imagination endows your lover with, which all melt away when the intimacy of domestic life shows you him as he is, and the deferential lover becomes the exacting husband. I liked your uncle very much when I accepted him, and became very fond of him later, so that I speak from my own personal experience as well as from observation. They always said in the country that Sir Herbert and myself were a model couple!"

Alice could hardly suppress a smile when she remembered Mrs. Bennett's account of her uncle's married life. It is difficult to quarrel with a person who lets you have all your own way, and would say black was white at your bidding.

"Yes; but supposing the love never did come, aunt!" suggested Alice, smiling. "I think if I were tied to a person I couldn't care for I should just hate him!"

"Oh, no you wouldn't! How many of us have to live with people we don't care for in a pleasant state of indifference that allows of perfect civility—and even consideration!"

"But that must depend upon the disposition. I couldn't, I am sure!"

"Oh, yes you could! People learn tolerance as they go along."

"I hope they do," Alice said; and then they went on to talk of Greta's peculiar beauty.

"I can assure you, she was quite mobbed abroad," Lady Avanley said. "You see, she is so unlike other girls. She might have married an Italian prince, a German baron, and half-a-dozen French counts if she had liked; but I kept back, for I should prefer an English nobleman."

"And Greta?" said Alice, rather amused at the calm way in which her wishes and ideas were ignored by her ambitious mother.

"Greta must do as she is told."

"But you and she might have diametrically opposite tastes, Lady Avanley, so that she might find it impossible to like the man you thought very desirable and charming!"

"I should take care about that, of course,

and choose a man who was not only to my taste, but was generally popular."

"A very popular man is not always a satisfactory husband."

"My dear,"—with indulgent irony—"what do you know about such things?"

"I know what I have read and seen, aunt Cecilia."

"Possibly; but a grain of experience is worth a pound of precept. I speak of my own knowledge, you see. However, it is always a mistake for two people to discuss a subject on which they don't agree, so I propose we talk of something else. By-the-bye, you sing, do you not?"

Alice assented readily. This was her forte, and she was too unaffected to pretend a diffidence she did not feel.

"Yes; shall I sing to you?" she said, simply, and rose and went to the piano.

Lady Avanley liked only operatic music, and as Alice had learnt a good deal of this with her master she was able to satisfy her.

When they parted for the night Lady Avanley actually kissed her for the first time.

"I think we have been wonderfully well amused, all things considered, don't you? Greta would hardly believe we could have been so cheerful without her."

The next day Lady Avanley was still charming, and invited Alice to drive with her, making much of her, as she had done the night before. Looking back upon this interval in after days, and at the refined cruelty of the contrast forced upon her, Alice wondered how anything but a demon could have hatched such a plot; and was inclined to exonerate Greta from all her offences because she had been cursed with such a mother.

In Wittershaw Lady Avanley had a good many little commissions to execute, and left Alice at the library to choose some books whilst she went to the jeweller's.

"I shall be back in a quarter-of-an-hour," she observed, as she left; "and then I think we may go home."

Alice looked out half-a-dozen volumes—a fashionable novel for Lady Avanley, something a little more solid for herself; and then she sat down at the table, and amused herself with a magazine.

She was bending over the book, absorbed in an essay, when some one touched her shoulder, and looking up quickly she saw, to her surprise, Sir Charles Avanley.

She would have given the world if she could have stifled the burning blush that rose to her face, or steadied her voice a little; but she entirely lost her presence of mind for the moment, and sat staring at him as if he were a ghost, as she said,—

"I thought you were in town!"

"I had to run up the day before yesterday on business, but I did not say a minute longer than I was obliged. I could not rest until I had the explanation you promised me the last time we met."

"I did not promise you an explanation, Sir Charles. You said you should insist upon one, and I let the assertion pass. I do not think an explanation would do either of us any good!"

"I must be allowed to differ from you. Would you allow anyone to withdraw the friendship they had promised you, without telling you why?"

"I should prefer to know the reason, of course!"

"And yet you refuse it to me. I value your friendship very highly," he added, his blue eyes speaking of something stronger than love as they sought hers persuasively. "For the sake of our kinship, if for nothing else, Alice, grant me what I ask. Indeed, I appeal to your sense of justice—the worst criminal is never condemned unheard."

Yes, this was true. And in justice she did owe him an explanation, she knew. If she had attempted to avoid one, it was because she was so afraid that whilst judging him she would be betraying herself. But not being prepared to make a full surrender she took refuge in an evasion, desperately,—

"I did not condemn you without the fullest proof, Sir Charles. And, you see, I am so placed that I cannot explain."

"Why?"

"I am staying in Lady Avanley's house."

"What has that to do with it? Lady Avanley is not always there."

"You forget that it would look odd for me to make appointments."

"Pshaw!" he cried, impatiently. "It is not obliged to be called by that name."

"I find it even more difficult to deceive myself than to deceive others," she answered, with dignity. "I was brought up to believe that what was clandestine was necessarily wrong."

"To a great extent I go with you—for I hate deception, too; but there is no question of that in our case. I have been an almost daily visitor at the Dower House ever since Lady Avanley's return to the neighbourhood; and she herself gave me permission to go in, even when she was out, supposing Greta were prepared to receive me."

"But I am not Greta, Sir Charles!"

"The position is the same, since you are also young."

"Even admitting all this, I do not see that it would bring us any nearer to an explanation, since Lady Avanley would be there; and it is impossible to speak before her."

"Lady Avanley won't be at home to-morrow afternoon," observed Sir Charles, quietly.

"How do you know?"

"I have just met Lady Edward Curzon, and she asked me to go to her this afternoon, mentioning that my aunt had promised to be there. She also said she expected you."

"Expected me! I have heard nothing about it," replied Alice, in a tone of surprise.

"Lady Avanley probably accepted for you."

"I should hardly think so; for she quite agreed with me yesterday that all the while I was in such deep mourning it was better I should not go out."

"Well! then. I suppose she just said yes because it has a pleasant sound than no, and doesn't entail any explanations."

"It entails explanations afterwards, I should think."

"Not in society, where people have a polite way of forgetting everything they are not meant to remember!"

"It must be nice to have such a convenient memory."

"It is easily acquired, I suppose; for I have known innocent young country girls after one season in town become as courteously mendacious as old women of the world. I sometimes fear that you have an aptitude for this sort of thing."

"Do you mean me, individually?"

"No; for it was that very candour that attracted me. I saw you were reliable and truthful, whatever shams there might be elsewhere."

"You see, I have never passed a season in London!" she said, trying to jest, in order to relieve the embarrassment of the situation.

"Twenty seasons in London would not alter you, I am sure—Alice! But here comes Lady Avanley," he added quickly, as they caught a glimpse of her velvet and furs in the shop beyond. "Mind, I am going to the Dower House this afternoon at four, and shall expect to see you."

His tone of authority both piqued and pleased her somehow; but she still intended to object, only that Lady Avanley sailed in at this moment, and not so much as a whisper or a glance would have escaped her keen observation.

"At any rate," Alice said to herself, "since he insists, I must tell him the truth; and when he finds I know all, he will not trouble me again."

This reflection ought to have been a very consolatory one; but it did not cheer Alice as it ought to have done, for Lady Avanley rallied her that evening on her paleness, and laughingly said,—

"Melancholy doesn't suit your style, my dear. You should be L'Allegro, and Greta II Penseroso—the rose looks up laughingly at the sun, and the lily hangs her pale head, and

sighs. You should always act up to your character."

"It seems more natural to me to follow the mood and feeling of the moment," Alice replied.

"That's a dangerous habit."

"But I have nothing to hide, Aunt Cecilia!"

"Lucky child, to have no secrets and no sorrows!" exclaimed Lady Avanley, sighing demonstratively. "You have made me feel so envious I must go to bed, and sleep off my bad feelings."

And she waved her hand smilingly to Alice, took up her French novel, and disappeared.

CHAPTER XIX.

ALICE felt rather curious the next day as to whether Lady Avanley would refer to the invitation she had received for her.

But it seemed as if Sir Charles were right, and she had only accepted to save herself the trouble of explaining, for she only said, when Alice passed in the hall ready dressed for her walk,—

"I shall not be home to tea, so you can have a nice long afternoon for practice. Do try over 'In questa tomba oscura,' it is such a great favourite of mine."

Alice coloured guiltily as she promised, wishing with all her heart now she had had the courage to deny Sir Charles altogether.

Of course she might still have evaded him had she chosen, by extending her walk beyond the time he had fixed for his visit; but this seemed to her a mean way of getting out of the engagement she had permitted, if not actually made, and so the end of her cogitations found her back at the Dower House ten minutes before the clock struck four.

She had just time to remove her hat and smooth her hair, when she heard the sound of horses' hoofs on the gravel outside, and ran quickly downstairs and seated herself before Sir Charles entered.

They were using the amber handkerchief only this afternoon, and Alice found Greta's crimson screen a comfort and resource.

She had so arranged her chair that her back was to the light, which was already beginning to wane a little. Cox would not bring in the lamp until five o'clock tea, so that she had a good hour before her; and in this time you can settle the fate of nations, and your own destiny besides, if you like.

Sir Charles looked grave as he entered.

She noticed this at once; for he had one of those mobile, expressive faces which reflect every thought within, and his lips were shut firmly under his blonde moustache, as with a man who has come to some strong resolution.

Alice had taken care there should be no chair near hers he could occupy; but this small obstacle was disposed of easily, for he fetched himself one, and put it down just in front of her, where he could see and hear her perfectly.

He waited until the last echo of Cox's footsteps had died away in the hall, and then he said gently, but decidedly,—

"I have come for my explanation, Alice."

"I am sorry for it," she answered, coldly.

"You would be satisfied to misjudge me, then?" he said, in pained surprise.

"Unfortunately, I know I am not doing that, Sir Charles; we must believe the evidence of our own eyes."

"We do not always put the right interpretation on things we see, remember. One may look guilty and yet not be guilty."

"In that case the matter is easily explained."

"Of course; but you cared so little to exonerate me, it appeared, you would not give me a chance of explaining."

Alice hung her head, and was mute. She could not tell him why she had been so anxious to keep him at bay; and would have died rather even than he should have suspected the reason.

"Is not this true?" he asked, finding she did not answer him.

"It seems so, I am afraid."

"Was it not so, then?"

"No," she answered, hesitatingly.

"Alice," he said, passionately, "all these mysteries and evasions hurt me cruelly; and are so unlike you, besides. Tell me, frankly, what you have against me, and let me clear myself at once."

"You see, I have no right to judge you and your actions, or to be disappointed when you do ill."

"If your cousinship does not give you this right, I do," he answered, eagerly. "How have I offended you?"

"I am not offended, Sir Charles, only—only—"

"Go on!" he urged, bending so forward in his excitement his warm breath fanned her face.

"I am painfully disappointed in you. I thought you were good and true and upright, and I found that all the while you were deceiving everyone!"

"How?"

"I need not go into details, surely. You will understand when I tell you I knew your secret!"

Sir Charles started as if he had been shot and his very lips went white.

"Impossible!" he stammered out at last.

"It isn't only possible—but true," she answered coldly. "I saw her!"

He stared at her aghast.

"When? Where?"

"In your own grounds one evening. I knew already there was some mystery connected with the north wing of the Hall; for Mrs. Bennett seemed quite overcast when she found I had carried my explorations to the little passage that led there, and said you had given orders any servant showing any curiosity on the subject should be dismissed."

"Yes, I did," observed Sir Charles, in a tone of deep dejection.

"But I did not know what your secret was then," pursued the girl; "although I knew you must have some reason for this prohibition."

"But not necessarily a bad one. If Lady Avanley were to shut up a part of the Dower House I should not at once conclude that she had something to hide."

I have never had occasion to use that wing, being a bachelor, and did not think it worth while to renew the furniture whilst I remained single."

"That was nobody's affair but your own, Sir Charles; but I do think you had no right to come amongst us under false pretences. If you had a wife, wherever she might be, you ought to have introduced her boldly to the neighbourhood."

"Good heavens! Alice, you are dreaming! I have no wife!"

"The more shame to you!" she answered vehemently.

"If that be an error it is one I should be only too glad to rectify!" he replied, a smile breaking over his haggard young face. "Will you be my wife, Alice? I promise you the north wing shall be swept and garnished before you come."

"It is you who are dreaming now!" she returned, haughtily, although a burning blush suffused her face, and tinged the very edge of her bright hair as she spoke. "Do you think I would turn anyone out, who had a better right to be there than myself, to make room for me?"

"No one has a right there but the woman I love; and"—trying to take her hand—"I loved you, Alice, with all my heart and strength, from the first day I set eyes on your face."

"I think you forget very easily, Sir Charles. The impression you gave me on my arrival was that you were attached to my cousin Greta."

"If you said fascinated by her, you would be nearer the truth. She was so different to any girl I had seen before. I felt strangely attracted for the moment, disapproving highly all the while of some of her sentiments, and feeling she was the last woman in the world I really wanted for my wife. Whilst I was in her company all was well—the minute I was alone, and

could reflect, I was beyond measure troubled at the fate I saw myself drifting into. In fact, I mistook dress for gold; and was not enlightened until I saw the two side by side, and could compare the two. Then I knew that, whatever happened, I could never marry Greta Avanley, and that the great love of my life was just dawning. Surely, coming so early it cannot have come too late!"

Alice covered her face with her hands—the prey to a terrible temptation indeed. What was this other woman—the girl with the black impassioned eyes and splendid dark beauty—to her that she should sacrifice herself to avenge her wrong?

Sir Charles had sworn he had no wife, and it was not for her to question him farther, but rather take him at his word, and be happy.

If any harm came of it, at least she would have had a happy time to look back upon—and by following her conscience she had a dreary, lifeless future before her, unbrightened by a single gleam of hope.

There was only to put her hand into Sir Charles's, and wealth rank and love would all be hers—thrust it from her, and the reverse of the medal was dependence and misery.

Why should she hesitate? Let the other defend her own rights—it was not her place.

Sir Charles fancied she was relenting from her silence, and his eager young lips were just against her hair, when she put him back, saying, despairingly,—

"No, no, it can't be. Be merciful, and leave me. I cannot bear any more."

"Why can't it be?" he asked, keeping fast hold of one hand in spite of her efforts to release it. You must give me a good reason."

"I told you just now, I would not displace one who had a better right to the name than myself."

"And I also told you that the only person who had a right to the name was the girl I loved—which is yourself."

"Ah!" she answered, more sadly than angrily, for the thought of what might have been filled her heart with an anguish and regret that stifled all other feeling for the moment. "You should have considered this possibility before you allowed yourself to be led away. Now I see no hope for either of us."

"Then you do love me, Alice?" he cried, his whole face glowing with triumph. "You do love me, darling?"

"I never said so," she answered, drooping her pretty head until it almost touched his shoulder.

"No; but you half-admitted it when you spoke of our hope, as if we had the same."

She did not answer, and he went on, passionately,—

"You must love me a little—I love you so much! Do you know, I sit continually now in the room where I can picture you at the little tea-table; and your mother's chamber is now mine. I know every fold of Queen Elizabeth's ruff by this time, for I lie and watch that portrait in the morning because I know it is dear to you. Think how pleasant to live where your mother lived, Alice! Won't it be easier for her to picture her child in the home she loved so dearly in life?"

"Oh! hush!" she cried, distressfully. "It can't be; you must see that!"

"I see no earthly reason why we should not be married this day month—or even earlier, if we like."

"And what would become of her, in that case?" she asked, angrily.

"Whom do you mean?"

"The handsome girl with the black eyes, who lives in the north wing."

"No handsome girl with black eyes lives in the north wing. I give you my solemn word of honour."

"It is not worth while to lie to me!" she answered, scornfully. "I saw her go in there myself."

"Possibly; but if you had waited long enough you would also have seen her come out again."



[“I WILL NOT TAKE SUCH AN ANSWER, ALICE, I GIVE YOU FAIR WARNING,” CRIED SIR CHARLES.]

“What difference would that have made? She went there to see you, did she not?”

Sir Charles was mute; but you could see by the workings of his face what this silence cost him; and though Alice was forced to condemn him, she pitied him too, for if he had sinned he was suffering for his sin—and to a tender heart even deserved punishment is cruel pain.

“Unfortunately, I am so placed I can explain nothing,” Sir Charles said at last. “I can only ask you to trust me a little while, Alice; for, though I admit there is a secret, I swear to you there is nothing in this secret which is an offence to you.”

“I have heard that men consider it no dishonour to deceive women,” she returned, angrily. “They would be ashamed to say what was not true to another man; but we are fair game always, and the more you fool us the prouder you seem.”

“Oh! Alice, do you not speak like this!” he cried out, in great distress. “I would as soon insult my mother’s memory as lie to you. For that reason I am silent when I might give you some plausible explanation of what you saw, if I chose.”

“It would have had to be plausible indeed, to impose upon me after what I saw.”

“What you saw proves very little, after all.”

“I am sorry I can’t agree with you, Sir Charles,” she answered, formally. “And now is there any need for us to continue the subject? I must acknowledge it pains me greatly to be obliged to think ill of one whom I wanted so much to like and trust.”

“Alice, you shall love, not like me, and trust me ‘all in all’ before a month has passed away. Will you try and suspend judgment until then?”

She shook her head sadly.

“I am not one of those who can stifle reason and common sense. My reason has condemned you, Sir Charles!”

“I know; but let your heart plead a little. Oh!” he added, vehemently, “if I had only an eloquent tongue, and could move you, Alice!”

“You could move me, perhaps, if you told me the truth.”

“That honour forbids, unfortunately. I could not break my solemn oath even to please you, Alice; but I have such a high opinion of you, I believe I should not please you by doing what was mean and wrong.”

“That is the last thing I should require of you.”

“And yet it is the only way to gain your confidence.”

“I never said that.”

“In words I know; but you admit that you cannot suspend judgment until I have a chance of clearing myself.”

“My judgment is already formed. If you could have shown me I was wrong I should have been very glad; but evasion and delay are not satisfactory when one is hoping for a frank explanation.”

“But can’t you wait a month—only a month?” he said, desperately.

“In a month’s time I shall not be here.”

“But you must be here, Alice. I will speak to Lady Avanley, and tell her I am hoping to make you my wife, and I count upon your having a home with her until our marriage can be arranged. She may find it convenient to oblige me,” he added, significantly. “It would be inexpedient, and against her usual policy to quarrel with her husband’s relatives—especially when they might be useful to her. ‘I will speak to her at once,’ he added, quickly; ‘and then she cannot say we have deceived her.’”

“If you did speak to Lady Avanley to-night I should leave early to-morrow morning,” returned Alice, with decision. “I would not have her think there was anything between us for the world!”

“Why not?”

“Because she would not like it, for one thing; and, moreover, it would place me in a false position, as I have no intention of becoming your wife.”

“Not if everything is explained, Alice?” he said, bending down to look into her averted face.

“I am afraid there is no chance of its being explained in a way that would satisfy me, and make me feel that I could honestly accept your hand, Sir Charles, and I would admit no compromise.”

“Oh! Alice, what makes you so hard to me?” he said, as if the words were wrung from him in the desperation of his pain. “And I love you so terribly!”

“A little while ago, Sir Charles, you loved the other terribly too, I daresay, and my turn may not last longer than hers.”

“Alice!”

His tone of passionate reproach and anguish touched her suddenly, and from a quick revulsion of feeling, repented of a moment afterwards, she held out her hand to him, saying,—

“Forgive me, Sir Charles; but this is as hard for me as it is for you—or harder, because I have not brought it on myself.”

“Nor I. Oh! Alice, my darling, my love, my life! revoke your cruel words, and give me hope. I cannot live without you—you must know that.”

And he covered the little hand she had surrendered with his warm kisses.

She struggled to her feet somehow, feeling that she must get away at once or she was undone.

All this was so very sweet to hear. How could she deny him? Never had a woman who said “No” longed more ardently to say “Yes,” and, though she had been so sure of herself in the early part of their interview, she felt herself yielding now, and knew that her only safety was in flight.

She suddenly wrenched her hand out of his and moved swiftly towards the door.

“I will not take such an answer, Alice; I give you due warning,” he followed her to say, and tried to catch at the skirt of her dress to detain her. But she was too quick for him, and had turned the handle of the door and disappeared before he could add another word, or make any new effort to prevent her flight.

[[To be continued.]]



[A LOVER'S QUARREL.]

NOVELETTE.]

LADY GERTRUDE'S WHIM.

CHAPTER I.

THE COUSINS.

"LADY GERTRUDE CHALLONER and Miss Edith Challoner," announced a footman as he ushered two beautiful girls into the presence of the mistress of Powis Court.

"My dearest Gertrude, I am so delighted to see you! How forcibly you remind me of your dear mother! I shall love you for her sake as well as for your own." So saying Mrs. Powis folded one of the fair girls in her arms and imprinted a frosty kiss upon her brow; then she turned to the other and said, in a tone and manner that was much more condescending than cordial, "And you also, Edith, I am glad to see," and she gave the latter her hand, that being quite sufficient welcome, in her opinion, for a penniless girl who would never have been here as a guest if her wealthy cousin could have been induced to come without her.

The girl addressed as Gertrude submitted to the caress rather than responded to it; but an amused smile came over the face of her companion as she took the limp hand in her own, and said, brightly, and with as much self-assurance as though she were the most important person present,—

"Thank you, Mrs. Powis, I am sure I shall enjoy my visit immensely. What a pretty place you have here! I was telling Doll as we came into the house that I should enjoy nothing better than a dance on your beautiful lawn—it looks like a carpet of green velvet."

"Doll!" repeated Mrs. Powis, with an assumption of offended dignity. "Do you address your cousin by that absurd name?"

"Absurd, indeed!" laughed the girl. "I think the names Doll or Dolly uncommonly pretty. I should much prefer either to being

called Dot; and that is the cognomen usually applied to me. But who is that young man in the garden; I fancy I have seen him before?"

"That is my son," replied Mrs. Powis with cold severity. "You cannot have seen him elsewhere."

"No; but I have seen his portrait, and I remember coo thought he had rather a nice face. But I am awfully tired; we have had a fatiguing journey, and I shall be glad to lie down for an hour and have a cup of tea," and Miss Edith Challoner half smothered a yawn, while Mrs. Powis could scarcely repress her indignation. She was accustomed to exact a considerable amount of deference even from her son; and that this girl, who was little more than a dependent upon her cousin's bounty, should presume to express herself in this free-and-easy way, showed a want of appreciation of the true condition of affairs which was well-nigh intolerable. Being in the position of hostess, however, Mrs. Powis felt that she could not administer so severe a rebuke as the case demanded, so she contented herself with saying, in her most frigid manner,—

"A servant shall show you to your room, Miss Challoner; and while you are in my house I hope you will order anything you require, and make yourself quite at home."

"Thank you, I will," was the careless response, as the girl rose from her seat to follow the servant, while her cousin was about to accompany her.

"I will take you to your room myself, my dear," said the elder lady, laying her hand affectionately upon that of the girl she had embraced.

"Dot and I always sleep in the same room," said Lady Gertrude, appealingly, "Don't we, Dot? I shouldn't like to be alone," she added, with a glance at the mistress of the house.

Mrs. Powis gave her handsome shoulders the slightest possible shrug, as she replied,—

"Very well, my dear; I will have a second

bed put into the room I ordered to be prepared for you; but do spare your cousin for a few minutes since she is so awfully tired; you shall rejoin her presently."

Lady Gertrude sank back into her chair with an air of resignation, while Edith smiled as she left the room, though her hostess fancied she saw her hold up a finger in a warning manner to her cousin.

"What a very overbearing young person your cousin seems to be," remarked the mistress of the house, as soon as the girl, towards whom she already felt a strong dislike, was out of hearing.

"She is very nice, and very kind to me," was the answer. "Indeed, I don't know what I should do but for dear Dot!"

"It is very amiable of you to say so, my dear; but I should be inclined to say that it is you who are kind to her; she seems quite to forget her dependent position."

"Dependent!" echoed the girl, opening her soft, grey eyes in amazement. "I don't quite understand you! Dot is not dependent upon anyone."

"Well, no, perhaps I used too strong a word," Mrs. Powis hastened to say, feeling she had overshot her mark. "What I meant was, that your cousin seems quite to ignore the social distinction between you and herself. One would think that she was the only daughter of the late Earl Challoner instead of you."

"We are both the granddaughters of an Earl Challoner," said the girl with more dignity than she often displayed; "and Dot and I are more like sisters than cousins—her father and mine were brothers, and her mother and mine were sisters. But I am sorry that we came here, since you dislike her!"

"My dear Lady Gertrude, how you misinterpret my meaning," cried Mrs. Powis, hastily. "The idea of supposing that I dislike your cousin when I have only seen her for a few minutes. Pray banish such a thought from your mind; I only made the remark. I did it

because you are so amiable and yielding, that I thought your cousin slightly tyrannised over you; but of course I must be mistaken."

The girl slightly bowed. She was far more quick to take offence on her cousin's behalf than on her own, and the suggestion that she was tyrannised over quite failed to rouse any resentment in her mind.

Very soon after this she was conducted by her hostess to the splendidly furnished room which she and her cousin were to occupy.

They found Edith in an elaborate dressing-gown of white cashmere embroidered with silk and trimmed with lace.

Her rich brown hair was loosened and fell in thick waves over her shoulders down below her waist, while some of the shining mass rested upon the arm of the couch on which she was lying.

A small table with a cup of tea upon it stood by her side, and an open novel was in her hand. She was evidently making herself as much at home here at Powis Court as she was accustomed to do at Wayford Hall, where she resided with her cousin.

She glanced up from her book as the two ladies appeared at the doorway, but she did not change her position as she remarked,—

"I am glad you are come, Dolly; I am sure you must want a rest and a cup of tea as badly as I do."

Then, observing the severe expression on the countenance of her hostess she slightly raised herself on her elbow, and with a glance round her remarked,—

"What a very pretty room this is, Mrs. Powis; we have nothing at all like it at Wayford Hall."

"I am glad you approve of it, Miss Challoner," was the formal answer. "I hope you will have recovered from your fatigue by dinner-time, for I have invited a few friends to meet your cousin and yourself."

"Oh, yes, I shall be all right by that time, thank you," replied the girl, as she began to sip her as yet untasted tea.

After showing much solicitude for the comfort of Lady Gertrude, Mrs. Powis at length left the cousins together, and she would scarcely have felt flattered if she had heard the comments upon herself.

"What a cat!" exclaimed the girl on the couch. "I am almost sorry we came here, Dolly."

"I am quite sorry," was the response; "I should like to go away at once. And I can't do as you want me to do. Dot, indeed I can't."

She was almost crying as she said this; but she met with scant sympathy from her cousin, who exclaimed, impatiently,—

"Stuff! What have you to do but to hold your tongue. I have given Tomlin strict orders as to what she is to do and say; our amiable hostess has fallen in love with you already, and very probably her son will do the same. If he is like his mother he is sure to prefer a soft, sweet, gentle girl like you to a self-willed creature like me."

"If he pays me so much as a compliment I shall tell him everything," said Dolly, with momentary decision. "I wouldn't marry him under the circumstances; no, not for—"

"Well, never mind what for, my dear, he hasn't asked you yet," interrupted Dot. "Come and pour yourself out a cup of tea, and try to be amiable. You have gone too far to turn back at this stage," but if our visit promises to be unpleasant we can bring it to a conclusion at any time. I mean to make myself comfortable while I am here, and I advise you to do the same."

Then she turned to her book, and her cousin knew from past experience that further expostulation would be useless.

They were very lovely girls, and they were so much alike that they looked rather like twin sisters than cousins.

The similarity, however, was in form, feature, and colour, rather than in expression; for while the one whom Mrs. Powis had welcomed as Lady Gertrude was quiet, shy, and retiring, Edith was bright and dashing,

both in manner and in speech, and she was always on such good terms with herself that it was almost impossible to snub her or to put her in the background.

Obviously the two girls had been invited to Powis Court because Mrs. Powis had entertained a very warm affection for the late Lady Challoner; but both of them knew well enough that this was not the real reason why the scheming, self-willed woman, who had received them with such a marked difference, desired their presence here.

She wished that her son should marry, but she was determined to select a wife for him herself; and as Mrs. Powis, as well as the estate, was heavily mortgaged it was imperative that the young man should marry as a heiress.

This was the mother's view of the case, and she had managed to entertain more than one rich and pretty girl in the hope that the end she desired might be gained. But Gerald Powis was not a marrying man, and he cared far too little for wealth to entertain for a moment the idea of tying himself for life to a woman for the sake of her money; and although mother and son had never yet come into open collision he was, at least, as self-willed as she was, and would be quite the last man in the world to submit to maternal dictation in making choice of a wife.

His father's experience had been a caution to the son, for the late Mr. Powis had married for money, though he never received the fortune that he expected to get with his wife, her trustee having embezzled it; but this had not prevented Mrs. Powis from reminding her husband, in any domestic squabble, that when he married her she was possessed of fifty thousand pounds.

Gerald had heard this repeated so often, that he had come impatiently remarked, that if ever he did marry, he would marry a girl who hadn't a shilling, and his mother was beginning to fear that he would keep his word.

"I am afraid I have made a mistake in inviting these girls," she mused, after she had left the cousins together. "Lady Gertrude is very sweet and amiable, but she is decidedly insipid, and Gerald is sure to prefer Edith, if only to vex me. I wonder what I had better do?"

Her meditations were interrupted by the entrance of Miss Marsh, who filled the part of companion—bodily and butt—to the overbearing woman.

"I heard you were alone, my dear; and I thought that perhaps you were not quite well," said the sycophant, advancing with her usual sidelong movement, which was apt to remind one of the mode of progression peculiar to crabs.

"I'm well enough, but I'm worried," was the impatient reply; "very much worried!"

"Dear, dear, how sorry I am. What can have put you out, and you so amiable, too,—and so used to having everything go straight. Is it anything very serious?"

"Serious—no! but it's annoying. I don't like that Edith Challoner at all; and she has her cousin completely under her thumb, so that I don't believe the silly young woman dare call her soul her own. I wish to Heaven I had never invited Edith here; she is just the kind of girl to mar all my plans, and if there is one thing I do dislike beyond another, it is a selfish, headstrong woman."

Miss Marsh turned her head to hide the smile which even she could not repress; but her voice had its old cringing tone in it as she responded,—

"Yes, of course, you do; but how unfortunate that you should have asked her. What can be done? Can't you send her away?"

"How can I send her away when she has only just arrived?" retorted Mrs. Powis, snappishly. "What nonsense you do talk, Marsh! I can't turn the girl out of the house—particularly as her cousin would go with her! Why, what are you gaping at now?"

"Mr. Gerald and a gentleman!" was the reply. "They are coming into the house. Shall I leave the room?"

"Certainly not! Who is it?"

And Mrs. Powis put up her eye-glasses, for she was short-sighted; and the face of the man who was to be seen through the windows, walking with her son, was indistinct to her.

Her own face changed, however, as she recognized him, and she said more cheerfully,—

"It is Lord Dunstan! Yes, you may go."

Then she muttered, half under her breath, as Miss Marsh quietly slipped out of the room, "I must get him to create a diversion in my favour, if I can!"

The faded companion knew full well what her patroness meant; but she smiled sarcastically as she thought: "And he will fall in with your views as far as suits himself, no doubt; and, I daresay, we shall have one wedding if not two; and if Mr. Gerald only marries the strongest-headed girl, as I should like him to do, my dear friend will find there are many places in the world more comfortable than Powis Court. It is all very well to live here as mistress; but, for my part, I am sick of the place! And so will she be, I fancy, when the change I hope for comes! I'll go and have a look at these young people!"

Then Miss Marsh tapped at the door of the room occupied by the cousins, and being told to enter came forward with her most ingratiating smile, and inquired if there was anything she could do for them, and if they had all they required.

She was told briefly that they were not in want of anything; but Miss Marsh was not to be daunted, and very soon she was seated in a easy chair, and was talking to the girls as though she had known them for years.

"I wonder that I have never seen either of you before to-day," she was saying carelessly; "for my family live not very far from Wayford Hall, and my dear father was the late Lord Challoner's medical man."

"And your brother is our doctor now!" exclaimed Edith, with sudden interest.

"Yes, I believe he is," was the answer. "I have been going to pay a visit to my brother for the last ten years, but something has always happened to prevent my doing so; however, he is coming here to see me very shortly."

"I hope he won't come till we are gone," muttered Edith, under her breath.

But though Miss Marsh had strained her naturally sharp ears to catch the words, she could not quite make them out.

She chatted on for some little time longer, however, and as she was leaving the room she told the girls that young Lord Dunstan had just arrived at the Court, and she believed he would be persuaded to stay. She little suspected how much consternation her announcement produced.

Dolly sat in a chair, with her hands loosely clasped together, as she said helplessly,—

"You see what must happen now, Dot. I won't keep up this ridiculous farce any longer."

"You will just do as you are told, my dear," was the decided answer. "Leave the matter to me, and don't come down to the drawing-room until the second bell rings."

So saying Miss Edith flung her novel aside, sprang from her couch and ran for Tomlin, who on this occasion acted as maid to her and her cousin.

"Get out the dress that I look best in," she said, briefly; "and remember, what I told you."

Then with wonderful rapidity she began her toilette, which, though seemingly elaborate, was soon completed.

When she was ready she took up her novel again, and having given Tomlin an order in a tone so low that her cousin could not hear it, she walked down the grand staircase and out into the garden without meeting even a servant on the way.

"Now if he only comes, and comes alone," she muttered, "I think I can manage to make him do as I wish."

CHAPTER II.

DISSATISFACTION.

Less than an hour later than this, Mrs. Powis and her son were talking together in no amiable strain, when the young man suddenly exclaimed,—

"What a lovely girl that is with Dunstan! Who can she be?"

His mother arranged her *pince-nez* before she replied,—

"It must be one of the Challoner girls! Then, as she continued to watch the couple through her glasses she continued. "Yes, I thought so; it is Edith, a girl without a penny, who gives herself the airs of a duchess; but I am glad she is so engrossed with Dunstan, she—"

Then she checked herself, annoyed to find that she was uttering her thoughts aloud.

"She won't think me worth looking after, you fancy," added her son, with a smile. "But, she is wonderfully handsome, and if her cousin is at all like her, a man might be inclined to forget that she is an heiress. I must go and make Miss Edith's acquaintance; it won't do to let Dunstan have it all his own way."

"Don't be foolish, Gerald; Lady Gertrude is infinitely superior to her cousin and quite as good-looking. You will meet her at dinner; she is fatigued with her journey, and—"

She paused at this point, for her son, unheeding her remonstrances, had left her, and was on his way to join the couple, who were talking together with some animation.

They became silent as their host approached them, and there was a certain air of embarrassment about both of them which he did not fail to notice.

It passed away, however, when he introduced himself to Edith, and they were all chatting away merrily when Mrs. Powis, looking as grim and stately as a tragedy queen, approached them.

"Where is Lady Gertrude?" asked the hostess, looking about the garden as though she supposed the girl she sought was hidden under a bush.

"She is in her room, I believe," replied Edith, quietly.

"In her room!" repeated Mrs. Powis. "You don't seem to pay your cousin much attention, Miss Challoner."

"Attention!" repeated the girl, opening her eyes in unmistakable astonishment; "I am not my cousin's maid—nor her lover," she added, with a laugh; "if I were either, she might complain of want of attention."

Mrs. Powis bit her lip, while Gerald hastened to prevent any awkwardness by asking Edith if she had seen the fine collection of orchids which he had made.

Then he led the way to the hothouses, leaving his mother and Lord Dunstan to follow.

Neither of the young people knew how closely they were watched by the couple that followed them.

Mrs. Powis thought Lord Dunstan seemed annoyed and somewhat ill at ease, and she naturally concluded that he was vexed at the manner in which Edith Challoner so openly flirted with her guide, whom she had met for the first time in her life just ten minutes ago.

"It is disgraceful; it isn't modest, it isn't commonly decent!" thought the angry mother. "If they were old acquaintances it wouldn't look so bad—and she without a penny too! There, thank goodness, goes the first dinner-bell, now I can interfere."

And she did interfere to such good purpose that while the young men were sent off to dress Mrs. Powis did not leave Edith until she had seen her safely in her own room, where her cousin was somewhat dolefully awaiting her.

The mistress of the house expended a good deal of sympathy upon her, asked why she had shut herself up in this manner, and altogether treated Lady Gertrude like a favourite child who required a great deal of

petting, while Edith fidgeted about the room, evidently anxious to be alone with her cousin.

At length Mrs. Powis went away, having left herself only just time enough to dress for dinner and get downstairs to receive her guests, and then Edith exclaimed,—

"I have made it all right with Lord Dunstan, though he was almost as obstinate at first as you are, Dolly; so cheer up, old lady, and make yourself happy, for, besides getting my own way, I think I have made a discovery."

"A discovery!" echoed the other.

"Yes. Do you know, I feel almost sure that Lord Dunstan is in love with either you or me!"

The listener's face flushed painfully, and she turned away as she said, with an effort,—

"I am not surprised that he should be in love with you."

"Yes, of course, it must be," laughed Edith. "Everybody falls in love with me. There was old Lord Walton, who was, of course, my slave; and then there was Sir Percy Strongman. It was I who sent him nearly out of his mind by refusing him, wasn't it?"

"No; but both of those men were horrid, and you know it, Dot," said Lady Gertrude, with a laugh. "But what am I to wear to-night?"

"The same as I do, to be sure. I told Tomlin to get out our terra-cotta and crimson gowns. They are as effective as anything can be with bunches of forget-me-nots. By the way, I had quite a pleasant chat with Gerald Powis just now, and he isn't a bit like his mother."

"It is very ungrateful of me to say that it must be in his favour to be unlike her," responded Dolly; "but really I should soon get tired of our amiable hostess, and I still cannot help wishing that we had not accepted her invitation."

"I felt the same for the first hour after our arrival," was the answer; "but I am beginning to change my opinion, and I think we shall have rather a jolly time of it. We have no time to lose, however, and I do want both of us to look our very best to-night."

Whether it was their best or not they certainly looked very lovely as they entered the drawing-room, and many were the admiring eyes turned upon the two girls, who, although not sisters, were so singularly alike.

"Rather awkward for a man who married one of them," remarked one young fellow, as he stood looking at the cousins. "He wouldn't know which was his wife unless they stood together."

"He would know which belonged to him directly they spoke," replied Lord Dunstan.

"The resemblance is only external."

Then he went up to Lady Gertrude, and stood talking with her until told off by Mrs. Powis to take some dowager in to dinner.

But, however watchful Mrs. Powis might be, she could not keep her son from the side of the objectionable Edith, neither could she prevent Lord Dunstan from devoting himself to the heiress.

"It is my usual fate," she groaned that night, when all her guests had departed and only Miss Marsh was in the room with her.

"I always get just what I don't want. I am anxious that Gerald shall marry, but he must marry an heiress, and he is falling in love with a pauper. Oh! I shall go out of my mind, I know I shall! And if that girl comes into this house as its mistress I will leave it the same day. I will, indeed!"

"That will be dreadful," sighed Miss Marsh. "What a pity that Miss Edith is not Lady Gertrude—everything would be as you wish it then."

"Indeed it would not!" cried Mrs. Powis, angrily. "Whoever she might be, I would not tolerate that girl as my son's wife. But don't say anything more about it to-night. If this kind of thing continues I shall be ill."

Miss Marsh discreetly held her tongue. She knew the capricious temper of her patroness,

and she never ventured to contradict or disobey her.

Meanwhile the lovely cousins were as near a quarrel as they had ever been in their lives.

"Lord Dunstan says he thinks I ought not to lend myself to any form of deception, however innocent the intention or purpose may be," the girl known here as Lady Gertrude was saying.

"Bother Lord Dunstan!" was the impatient response; "he promised me that he would not expose my little plot."

"So he told me; and he will keep his word. But he thinks I ought not to take part in it," persisted the usually yielding girl; "and I know he is right. I have felt the same from the beginning."

"The beginning was a very short time ago!" exclaimed her cousin angrily. "I said this morning that I should like to change names with you for a week or two, and when we were announced by the footman this afternoon I pushed you forward, and Mrs. Powis gushed over you as the heiress and snubbed me as the pauper. She would have treated you in the same insulting way, and would have found me perfect if she had known the truth. I don't see why, when you have been accidentally mistaken for me, you should object to keep up the delusion for a little while. But please yourself; I know you are as obstinate as a mule when once you have taken an idea into your head. What do you propose to do?"

"You mustn't be angry with me, Dot, but I think I will go to Aunt Marsden's to-morrow, and I will stay with her until you join me, or until you want me to go home with you. I really can't live here under false colours, I shall expose the whole thing, if only out of sheer nervousness."

The response of the real Lady Gertrude was not complimentary.

She had been spoilt from her childhood, and everyone with whom she had come in contact had yielded to her in a greater or less degree.

After accepting the often-repeated invitation of Mrs. Powis to pay a visit to Powis Court, the sudden whim had seized the capricious heiress to assume the name of her cousin, and to be liked or disliked for herself rather than for her possessions.

This desire was natural enough; but to make the real Edith appear as the heiress was a very different matter, and for once the gentle girl rebelled.

For the rest of the night the spoilt beauty sulked, and the next morning she was in the same unamiable condition, probably hoping to make her cousin change her mind and yield, as she had often done before.

But Dolly was firm.

She would not expose Gertrude, but she utterly refused to remain here in such a false position; and she so arranged matters that early in the afternoon a telegram came from Lady Marsden, her aunt, entreating her to come to her immediately.

Why she was summoned in such hot haste was not stated, but that there was good reason for it was taken for granted, and Edith said she must go to her relative without delay.

Mrs. Powis was loud in her lamentations for she had planned several little entertainments for her guests; and she was therefore somewhat startled when her son turned to the girl whom she knew as Edith Challoner and asked,—

"Are you also obliged to go to Lady Marsden's?"

"No; I shall return to Wayford" was the answer. "Lady Marsden and I don't get on well together."

"Surely, in that case, you will take pity upon my mother, and stay with us for a week or two?" said Gerald, earnestly. "She will have to put off all the people whom she has invited to these dinners, and dances, and garden parties, if you don't; for the fatigue of enter

taining them alone will be too much for her."

"Oh, don't think of me!" here interposed Mrs. Powis, quickly.

But meeting her son's eye she saw something in his face that made her pause, and add as a kind of after thought,—

"But it certainly will be very fatiguing."

Nothing more was said on the subject at the moment, but Lady Gertrude observed that Lord Dunstan seemed to approve of her cousin's conduct, even though he would lose her society thereby.

"I wonder if he does really mean to propose to Dolly?" she mused. "He is rather a nice fellow—though not half so nice as Gerald. I wish now that I hadn't been so silly; but I mustn't go on like this, or I shall soon be sitting down with my hands folded meekly before me, and saying, with Sir Walter Scott:

'Oh what a tangled web we weave
When first we practise to deceive.'

I fancy I see myself sitting at that woman's feet on the stool of repentance. Heigho! I certainly am a most unlucky girl. I thought this little plot of mine would bring me all sorts of satisfaction, and it has brought nothing but vexation. Upon my word, I would confess, and try to laugh the matter off before Edith goes, only that Gerald would think I came here on purpose to marry him, and that would never do."

She was still perplexed as to what she should do when Mrs. Powis, who had been having a stormy interview with her son, came to her, and with as much cordiality as she could assume, begged that she would not think of going away because her cousin was obliged to leave them.

"It is so sad for me not having a daughter of my own!" said the elder lady, plaintively. "And my son has little sympathy with me—very little, indeed!"

Lady Gertrude felt inclined to defend the absent, and to say that she thought Gerald a very considerate son; but she remembered that her object, now, must be to win the good opinion of her hostess; so she said lightly,—

"But a daughter is a daughter all the days of her life; a son is a son until he gets him a wife!"

"Yes, no doubt that is true enough!" responded Mrs. Powis, quietly; "but my son never will get himself a wife. He is that most objectionable of all creatures—a male flirt. I don't believe there is a woman living whom he would marry!"

This was utterly untrue, as Mrs. Powis knew full well; and though Lady Gertrude believed the assertion to be false, she felt as though she had received a blow in some vital part, from which she would not easily recover.

It was with a foreboding of sorrow, therefore, that she bade adieu to her cousin, for she felt that Dolly was right—and that she herself was wrong, though pride and a feeling which she shrank from analysing kept her from frankly confessing her folly.

"At any rate, now Dolly is gone, I can't do much harm to anyone but myself!" she thought, recklessly; "so I will go on with the little comedy—it cannot become a tragedy, that is one comfort."

As though life itself were not a tragedy!

But, hitherto, Lady Gertrude had found the world in which she lived a very comfortable place; people had shown a remarkable amount of amiability in allowing her to have everything she really desired, until she had grown a trifle selfish, while she rather prided herself upon being the reverse.

Life at Powis Court was very different for Lady Gertrude now her cousin had gone; for Tomlin, who, after accompanying Edith to her destination, had returned to her real mistress, was the only person to whom Gertrude could speak freely.

Not that she made a confidant of the woman—Lady Gertrude Challoner was not the kind of girl to do that, but she was glad to have the maid with her, and to feel that she was not quite alone in the enemy's camp.

"I have been a fool for my pains!" she thought, savagely, after her hostess had annoyed her a trifle more than usual. "If I had come here in my true character, Mrs. Powis would have embraced me—now she detests me!"

CHAPTER III.

"I LOVE YOU!"

ALTHOUGH Lord Dunstan had impressed upon the real Edith Challoner that she ought not to remain at Powis Court, bearing her cousin's name, and thus acting a lie, even if she did not tell one, he stayed on himself, and he devoted a great deal of his time and attention to the young lady, of whose conduct he so strongly disapproved.

Gertrude accepted his attentions, and cared nothing for his opinions; provided he did not expose her foolish whim, he might fetch and carry for her as much as he liked—but he must not expect any return for his seeming devotion; and, to do him justice, he never asked for any.

He stayed on for ten days—taking an active part in fêtes and garden-parties—and making Gerald Powis half wild with jealousy. And then he went away, regretted by Mrs. Powis, who thought he might mean to marry her unwelcome guest—though her son had never felt so glad to say adieu to an old friend as he was on this occasion.

Indeed, it was not until Lord Dunstan had gone that Gerald ventured to breathe the love which his looks and manner had so plainly revealed.

Lady Gertrude now talked about bringing her visit to a close.

She felt that Mrs. Powis only tolerated her presence, and she was beginning to weary of the close guard which she was obliged to keep over her own words and actions, lest she should betray herself.

There was the danger, likewise, of someone coming to the Court who knew her, and then she would have the mortification of being found out before she could confess the little deception she had practised.

Indeed, as the days went on the burden of what had at first seemed but a whimsical freak became almost intolerable to the high-spirited girl, and yet she could not summon sufficient courage to cast it from her.

It is astonishing what trouble people sometimes make for themselves by a careless "yes" or "no" in the wrong place at some critical moment of their lives.

The "yes" or "no" has been a falsehood probably uttered on the impulse of the moment, and with no grave intention to deceive; but having been spoken, it has required so many other fabrications to keep it in countenance that the result has been a lasting blot upon the career of the unfortunate individual who really meant no harm.

In the same manner Lady Gertrude's whim had been conceived in mere girlish caprice, and had been disowned by the cousins in jest, but it would never have been acted upon if her foot had not caught in her dress as she entered the drawing-room at Powis Court.

The momentary trip had made Edith precede her cousin, while the warm greeting she received silenced her for the instant, and Gertrude's imperious gesture kept her tongue tied, while she could not help feeling indignant at the marked difference in the manner in which Mrs. Powis received them.

Now the matter had grown until Gertrude herself was rather alarmed as to the possible consequences of her own folly.

But for one circumstance she would have returned home very soon after her cousin went away; and, with her usual reckless indifference to the opinion of others, would have cared but little whether or not Mrs. Powis ever found out the deception practised upon her.

There was, however, another person whose esteem Gertrude was very anxious to retain, and every day that went by made her feel more nervous as to the effect which the revelation

which must come, sooner or later, would have upon him.

"If I get out of this scrape comfortably I never will fall into another of the kind," she promised herself continually; but she took no decided step to get herself out of the difficulty, but drifted on, until at last, coming to the conclusion that discretion was the better part of valour, she determined to go home without further delay.

"Yes, I will go to-morrow!" she said to herself! "If Gerald cares enough about me to follow me, I can tell him the true state of affairs better in my own house than in his, and I feel that I cannot endure this condition of things any longer."

This decision was arrived at one morning soon after she awoke; and when Tomlin came to her mistress with her early cup of tea she was told to get everything packed in readiness to start the next morning.

"Are you really going, my lady?" asked the woman, doubtfully.

"Yes, I am really going; but just remember for another day at least that I am Miss Edith, and now help me to dress. I will wear pale blue this morning."

A couple of hours later Lady Gertrude was listening to the politely uttered regrets of her hostess at the prospect of losing her young guest.

The girl took the words at their true value, but she observed that Gerald made no remark on the subject, and he was not even civil enough to say he was sorry she was going.

Gertrude felt piqued at this manifest indifference on his part; and as soon as she could do so she went back to her own room, and having here provided herself with a book and a hat she slipped out of the house unperceived by anyone, and made her way to a part of the shrubbery where she knew she would be completely hidden, and where also she was almost sure to be undisturbed.

She was a high-spirited girl at all times, and now she was too proud to shed the tears which rose to her eyes; for though Gerald Powis had looked whole volumes of love, and since Lord Dunstan's departure words of endearment had more than once escaped him, he had not really told her that he loved her.

That it was want of opportunity that had been the cause of this backwardness never entered her mind, for it had not occurred to her that either the young man's mother or her companion, Miss Marsh, had invariably been present to prevent anything like a *little à l'été* between the young couple.

Now she sat sad and disconsolate, dissatisfied with herself, and suffering from a headache such as she had never previously experienced.

"And I have neither father nor mother to protect or advise me," she moaned. "I have nobody but Dolly who really cares for me, and even she listened to Lord Dunstan's advice rather than to my entreaties. I have heard that people sometimes envy me—they little know what it is they envy."

Thus ran her thoughts as the unopened book lay upon her lap, while her hands were loosely clasped upon the cover, and her whole figure was expressive of dejection.

And she was still sitting like this when Gerald Powis found her.

He had sent a message to her room asking her to meet him in the library; and then, finding she was not in the house, he had gone out into the grounds to seek her, and he had been hunting about for some time before he discovered her retreat.

It was not until he stood before her that she knew he was near, and then the quick blush that suffused her face more than half revealed the secret she strove to hide.

He was a very handsome man, and at this moment Gertrude seemed to realize how infinitely superior was his earnest gravity to the frivolous inanity or careless selfishness which characterized most of the young men of her acquaintance.

"I have been looking for you for the last

hour," he said, quietly, as he took a seat by her side.

"And I have been here all the time," she replied, trying, with the perversity of a woman to put off the avowal for which she had been waiting and longing. "This is a very favourite spot of mine."

"It is a place which I shall remember all my life," he said, earnestly, as he took her hand in his own, "because it will ever remind me of the time when I was made the most happy or the most wretched of men!"

She made no reply, but her heart beat wildly and tumultuously; the happiness she had hoped for, had feared would pass by her, was now at her feet.

"Mere words can never express the intensity of my feelings towards you, Edith," he went on, "I can only say that I love you, and that my life will henceforth be a blank unless you consent to share it."

Now was her time to speak, and to tell him her true name, and to confess the foolish deception which she had practised.

But pride and the fear of losing him chained her tongue, and the next instant it was too late.

"I have always guarded myself against loving any woman," he continued, still holding her hand, "since, despite the appearance of wealth I am in reality a poor man, because this place is so heavily mortgaged; but I would not under any circumstances marry a rich woman, and I feared that I dared not marry a poor one. I tell you this, dearest, in justice to myself, because if you accept me, we shall either have to practice great economy, or to let the Court and live elsewhere. Do you think you can marry me for myself alone, Edith?"

The name by which he addressed her was like a stab in her heart, and she said, tremulously,—

"I could only love you for yourself, Gerald."

Before she could say more he clasped her in his arms, and kissed her reverently and tenderly, believing her to be the casket in which dwelt every womanly virtue.

"I—I have a little money of my own," she ventured too say at last; and she laughed uneasily as she added: "You won't love me the less on that account, will you, Gerald?"

"I shall not love you better because of it," he replied, with what she fancied to be a harsh ring in his voice; "and whatever you have must always remain exclusively your own. I have seen too much misery result from mercenary marriages ever to venture my frail barge upon such a treacherous sea."

"But a marriage between people who both have money need not be mercenary," expostulated Gertrude, uneasily.

"No, my dear, it need not, but it usually is," was the answer, "and in nine cases out of ten it ends unhappily. But don't let us discuss the matter; we shall neither of us be overwhelmed with worldly wealth. If you had been an heiress I should have bolted directly I realised my danger, and should not have returned until you had departed."

"It would have been very rude of you to do so," she retorted, some of the pain she felt revealing itself in her voice; "and, besides, your mother will never be satisfied if you marry a girl who has no money."

"When a man seeks a wife he thinks more of his own chances of happiness than of his mother's prejudices," he returned, with a smile; "but let us forget all that is disagreeable, dearest, and talk about our own plans. Do you really mean to go to Wayford Hall to-morrow?"

"Yes, I mean to go home," she replied, nervously; "but there is no reason why you should not come and see me. There is a famous fishing inn in the village, where you can put up; that is," she added, with a deepening colour, "if you wish to do so."

"Of course I wish it; I was wondering if I might come," he said, quickly. "But don't keep me waiting for you, Edith; let us fix the date of our marriage before you go away; or

suppose you stay here a couple of days longer and we get married at once—what do you say?"

"That such a step would be preposterous," she said, promptly; "particularly when there is no need for such haste. Besides, you must see me in my own home before we decide anything; so the sooner you come to visit Dolly and me the sooner will we name the day."

She spoke in a light, jesting tone, but she was very resolute in her refusal to make any definite promise until he had paid a visit to Wayford Hall, the consequence being that he said he should not let more than a week pass over before he followed her to her cousin's house.

Then they began to talk of their mutual love, and the time passed by so swiftly that they were not a little startled by the appearance of a servant, who came to tell them that luncheon was waiting.

Indeed, luncheon had been waiting for a very long time, and Mrs. Powis was not only ill-tempered, but was likewise decidedly hungry before the trunks appeared.

A glance at their happy faces told the story of their mutual love, and completely spoilt her appetite; but, with the blindness of lovers, they did not observe this, and they even forgot to apologise for having kept her waiting so long.

They were equally oblivious for the rest of the day, which they spent almost entirely in each other's company, and Mrs. Powis felt too certain of the state of affairs to venture upon anything like expostulation.

Her unwelcome guest would leave the house on the following day, and it would go hard with the angry mother if she did not so manage matters that the girl whom she had begun to hate should never again cross the threshold of Powis Court.

So Mrs. Powis kept from any exhibition of temper as best she could, and she felt repaid for her self-control when Lady Gertrude went away on the following morning without anything having been said about an engagement between the young couple.

Her satisfaction was short-lived, however; for before she retired to rest that night she heard from Gerald not only that he intended to marry the girl who had just left them, but that it was more than probable that he should let Powis Court for a term of years, and reside with his wife in a much more modest establishment.

"And what is to become of me?" asked the angry mother, indignantly; "do you propose that I should live with you and your wife and a parcel of squalling children, in a semi-detached villa—I, who have been accustomed to a decent house all the days of my life?"

"No, mother, I am not so foolish as to desire an arrangement of that kind," he replied, with unflinching composure. "What I suggest is, that you should make any arrangement that will best suit your own comfort. Your jointure is a handsome one, considering the otherwise encumbered condition of the property, and I will take care that you receive it punctually. I suppose you will take Miss Marsh with you wherever you go?"

But Mrs. Powis was not in a condition of mind to make any plans for the future.

Words could not express the indignation she felt at the idea of Powis Court being let to strangers. She had lived here since her marriage and she meant to die here; and though she had wished her son to marry, she quite believed that she would be able to retain her position as mistress of his house.

A foolish expectation upon her part, but there was no one to point out the folly of such an idea except Miss Marsh, and she would never have been able to summon up sufficient courage for such a task.

Now, therefore, for the first time, the selfish, arrogant woman realized her true position, and she wildly resolved to do something which should prevent this hateful marriage from taking place.

But she controlled her temper in the presence of her son.

It was Miss Marsh who had to listen to the frantic outburst of passion and spite that she vented upon her son's chosen wife, and the timid creature tried to soothe the agitated lady by telling her that, after all, her troubles were only imaginary.

"Imaginary?" shrieked Mrs. Powis, with an accession of indignation; "if my trouble is imaginary, I should like to know what real trouble is!"

Her wish was gratified far beyond her expectations, and before many weeks had passed over her head she had only too good reason to know the difference between real and imaginary trouble.

CHAPTER IV.

"If he would come to-day, to-day, to-day, Oh, what a day to-day would be!"

LADY GERTRUDE CHALLONER was at home.

She had half expected to find her cousin Edith at Wayford Hall on her return, but in this she was disappointed; and, besides servants, she only found the elderly lady who had once been her governess, and was now her *chaperone*.

Nothing of any importance had occurred in Gertrude's absence, and no message or letter had come from Edith, and the self-willed heiress tried to settle down to her old life with comfort and contentment.

But this was quite impossible.

New hopes and fears had filled her heart since she last left the home of her fathers; new feelings had taken possession of her; all her gaiety and vivacity had fled, and anxious care reigned in their place.

For she could not hide from herself the probability that Gerald Powis would be so angry at the deception practised upon him that his love for her might not withstand the shock.

"Most men would think it an advantage to have won an heiress instead of a girl without a penny," she mused, sadly; "and any man but Gerald would take it as a compliment that I wanted him to love me for myself as I love him for himself, but he is so peculiar in his notions that I feel nervous at the very thought of meeting him."

Being anxious to have some one who would sympathize with her, and to whom she could unburden her mind, Gertrude wrote to Edith, begging her to come back to the Hall without delay, but by return of post she received a short note, saying that it was impossible to comply with the request for reasons which would presently be explained, and by the next post came the startling announcement that Edith Challoner had become Lady Dunstan.

"Well, of all the shabby things I ever heard this is the shabbiest!" exclaimed Gertrude, indignantly, when she realized what had happened. "The very least that Dolly could have done was to ask me to be present at her wedding when she has made my house her home ever since she lost her father! It is too bad of her! I have always treated her as a dear sister, and I believed she loved me even more than I loved her; but I suppose his lordship forbade her to tell me about the marriage until it was too late for me to put in an appearance. It was through him that she left me in the lurch, as she did at Powis Court; and yet he was deceitful enough all the time to pretend that he liked me!"

She nursed her anger until the next morning, when a long letter reached her, written by both bride and bridegroom, in which they told her that their wedding had been a very sudden affair in consequence of Lord Dunstan having to start for Egypt at very short notice, and they had been driven to decide between an immediate marriage or a long engagement.

"So we went to church and got the knot tied without any fuss or bother, as we advise you and Gerald to do, and then tell your friends about it afterwards," they wrote; "for

of course you have brought that young man to his knees long before this!"

Then followed a good deal of light badinage, which showed clearly enough that the young couple were very happy, and that they never suspected for a moment that Gertrude could have any trouble or anxiety from any source whatever.

Neither ought she to feel any, she told herself; and yet a foreboding of coming misfortune hung over her like a cloud, and nothing she could do would disperse it.

Gerald had not promised to write, neither had he asked her to send a letter to him; but for all this she did expect to hear from him, and she was more disappointed than she liked to admit when day after day went by and her lover neither wrote nor came.

At the end of a week she made sure he would come according to his assurance that a week would not pass over his head before he presented himself at Wayford Hall; and she dressed herself this day with unusual care, and she flitted from room to room in the fine old house, looking critically about her to see that flowers were everywhere that flowers could be, and then she sat down, pretending to read, though she really did not know what was on the page before her.

Mrs. Wrenshaw, her companion and *chaperone*, looked at her curiously many times this day, but she made no comment upon the young lady's strange manner, but maintained a judicious silence when a more than usually elaborate luncheon was served and no guest appeared to partake of it.

The hours of the afternoon seemed leaden-footed, but they went by at last, and dinner was eaten in solitary grandeur by the two ladies, who were more like lay figures on the occasion than like living creatures.

By this time Lady Gertrude's hope of seeing Gerald to-day had died out, but she would not yield to the inclination she felt to seek the seclusion of her own room, and she persisted in trying to spend this evening as other evenings had been spent—though in that she failed deplorably.

She retires to her own room at her usual hour with great self-control, and she submits to have her hair brushed and braided for the night by Tomlin; and she does not seem to hasten that worthy servant, though every moment through which she lingers seems to poor Lady Gertrude, like a whole lifetime of torture.

At last she is alone.

And now she is safe from the inquiring gaze of every curious eye she can throw off the restraint she has so resolutely imposed upon herself, and falling upon her knees by the side of her couch can yield to the agony that seems greater than she can bear.

Who shall say what torture that proud, sensitive woman endured as she knelt here in the utter abandon of despair?

As Gerald had not come to-day she felt sure that he would never come, and she writhed with the bitter mortification that she felt when she remembered how she had confessed her love for one who seemed to have set such slight store upon it.

Gradually anger and wounded pride gave place to bitter and humiliating grief, tears filled her eyes, sobs choked her utterance, and she became well nigh hysterical in her uncontrollable agitation.

And here on her knees she sobbed herself to sleep like a weary child, and the grey light of early morning was making the lamp look dim when Lady Gertrude awoke with the feeling that some great misfortune had befallen her.

The shiver that passed through her frame and the numb condition of her limbs told her that she had taken cold, and had she been less wretched she would have called up one of the servants to bring her something to counteract the chill which had seized her.

But she was too indifferent to mere physical suffering, too numb and too miserable to care what happened, and she slowly and painfully undressed and crept into bed, lying down

like a log, while her hands and feet were cold as stone.

The result of this condition of things might be anticipated, and when Tomlin came with the early cup of tea she found her mistress in an alarming condition of fever.

She was delirious too, and the doctor was hastily summoned to attend the poor girl, who lay moaning in pain, or calling in plaintive tones upon Dolly and Gerald to help her.

Poor Tomlin guessed how matters stood, but she dared not say a word. The whole affair was all too delicate for her unskilful hand to attempt to set it right, so she sat by the bedside of the fair sufferer, tending her gently and faithfully, and scarcely leaving her for necessary rest and food.

"If Miss Edith were only here, or if Mrs. Powis was anything like a kind-hearted woman, I'd try to do something," thought poor Tomlin, in great perplexity; "but Miss Edith is on her way to Egypt, and Mrs. Powis would only be too glad if the poor dear died. But I can't make out Mr. Gerald. A man has no business to behave as he did if he means nothing!"

Tomlin had very decided opinions of her own as to what a man ought to do; she had once in her life been a victim to the tender passion; and ever since her recovery from the attack she had thought it necessary to know a man's "intentions" before she allowed him to pay her even the most trifling attention, the natural consequence being that the would-be suitor went to pay his devotions at shrines where such prompt decision was not required of him; and Tomlin had, to use the expression of her female friends, "been left on the shelf."

Now, she mentally inveighed against Gerald Powis as the worst of his sex, and if ill-wishes could have done him harm he would have suffered even more pain than now fell to his share.

The attack of fever, though sharp and sudden, was not of long duration, and a fortnight after she had been taken ill Lady Gertrude was able to get down to the drawing-room, though she was still weak and listless.

For the truth was that she seemed to have lost her interest in life, and the fever had taken a stronger hold upon her than it would otherwise have done because she seemed to lack the desire to fight against the disease.

When she was strong enough to have her letters brought to her she showed some anxiety for a minute or two, but this quickly died out; and having opened the missives and looked at the signatures of those of which the handwriting was not familiar, she threw them aside unread. What hope! she for had not come, and she cared for nothing else.

"Has your mistress anything upon her mind?" asked Dr. Marsh one day as Tomlin met him after he had left his patient.

"I don't know, sir," was the startled and confused reply.

"I ask you because you seem to be more in her confidence than anyone else, and I don't mind admitting that I am exceedingly anxious about her. She is in such a critical state of health that unless some change takes place very shortly she will fall into a rapid decline—even a great misfortune might save her."

"A great misfortune!" echoed Tomlin.

"Yes, anything that would startle her out of the languid indifference to life which has come over her. My private opinion is, that some lover's quarrel is at the bottom of this illness."

"I can't say, sir," was the cautious reply; "my lady never takes her servants into her confidences."

"Humph! that's a pity; I thought you could have suggested something. It is a thousand pities that Miss Edith (or Lady Dunstan as we must now call her) has left her cousin at the moment when she most needs her; you cannot suggest anyone for whom you could send who would interest her, can you, Tomlin?"

"No sir, I can't," was the stolid answer;

"and think you must be mistaken about a lover's quarrel. Lady Gertrude caught a cold; that is what I believe is the matter with her."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders; past experience had taught him that Tomlin could not be induced to chatter unless she was in the humour to do so.

When he had gone, however, the lady's-maid sat down to meditate upon what he had said to her.

"He is as great a gossip as any old woman," she muttered, disdainfully; "and I wasn't going to give him anything to chatter about; but I've no doubt but what he says is true, and I don't doubt for a moment that she is worrying about Mr. Gerald Powis. But what can I do? If I was to write to him she'd never forgive me; and, now I come to think of it, he parted with her as if she belonged to him, and I don't believe she has heard from him since. I wonder if that mother of his has had anything to do with his keeping away!"

For a whole day Tomlin pondered over the matter, and then she thought she would write to Mrs. Powis's maid, and ask her to look for a bracelet of Lady Gertrude's which she believed had been left behind.

The letter would, she thought, afford an opportunity for asking some question that might help to set matters right.

Before writing, however, she mentioned the loss of the bracelet to her mistress, and said she believed she remembered leaving it in a certain drawer of the toilet-glass at Powis Court; then she remarked that she would write and ask if it had been found. But Lady Gertrude seemed to be roused into something like interest, and she said quickly,—

"I will write myself; I value that bracelet particularly, and I ought to have written to Mrs. Powis to tell her how much I enjoyed my visit to her house. You are sure you did leave the bracelet behind, Tomlin?"

"Yes, my lady, I am quite sure, unless it has been stolen," was the answer. "And perhaps it is better for you to write; only Mrs. Powis is such a strange lady."

She said this by way of caution, for she thought Lady Gertrude could not be too guarded with the mistress of Powis Court, since she fully believed that Gerald's mother was at the bottom of all this trouble.

But the girl needed no such caution, and though she felt she could have given her life to see Gerald once more or to hear the reason of his strange silence, she never so much as mentioned his name in her letter to his mother.

"My dear Mrs. Powis," she wrote, "the illness, from which I am only just recovering, must be my excuse for not writing earlier to thank you for your kindness while I was your guest. May I now ask you to add to it by ordering one of your servants to look in the drawer of the toilette-glass in the room I occupied for a gold bracelet which my maid thinks she left there. Trusting you are in good health, believe me yours sincerely,—

"GERTRUDE CHALLONER."

"She cannot think I am angling for her son with this!" she thought, bitterly, as she folded up the letter; "and indeed I am not doing so, I never desire to see Gerald again. I only wish to know what has caused him to desert me in this unmanly fashion!"

So the letter was sent, and by return of post an answer came which somewhat startled the recipient.

The missing bracelet came with it, and Mrs. Powis commenced her epistle by remarking that the trinket had been brought to her by a servant, who said Miss Challoner had left it behind.

"Not knowing where Lady Dunstan is to be found I retained it in the hope that I should one day have an opportunity of telling her what I think of her conduct," wrote the indignant woman. "She has wrecked my son's life and ruined my peace. Would you believe it, my dear Gertrude, your cousin

stayed here for weeks after you went away—though she must have known all the time that her presence was distasteful to me—and at length, when she had succeeded in intoxicating my poor Gerald's senses and clouding his judgment, she went away, having first promised to become his wife. This was a blow to me, though I could have forgiven it had she only been true to him; but my dear Gertrude, before a week had elapsed after she had become engaged to my son she married Lord Dunstan. If Gerald had possessed one spark of my spirit he would have cast all thought of such a worthless creature from him; but although I said all I could think of to rouse him to a due sense of his own dignity I utterly failed, and he is gone to New Zealand, and I am left in my old age childless and broken-hearted."

There was much more in the same strain—abuse of the girl who had wrecked the happiness of one of the truest and noblest men that ever lived, and much lamentation and self pity; but Lady Gertrude paid little heed to this. The terrible misunderstanding which her own foolish whim had occasioned stunned her for a time, for she could judge by her own feelings what Gerald must have suffered when he heard of her cousin's marriage.

"And he has gone away believing me false," was the thought which at length roused her.

Then she read again the letter written by the angry mother, and instead of resenting the harsh words concerning herself she felt inclined to add to their severity, feeling that nothing would be bad enough to say about a woman who could act as she was supposed to have done.

More than once she took up her pen and began to write to Mrs. Powis, but words were all too weak to express half of what she felt, and the depressing conviction forced itself upon her heart that nothing she could do would bring Gerald back again if he had once left England.

"If!"

The little word contained a world of possibilities. Men could not start for New Zealand at a day's notice—it was just possible that Mrs. Powis had exaggerated matters, and that she knew where a letter or a telegram would find her son; and, at the bare hope which such an idea gave rise to, all Lady Gertrude's weakness and indecision vanished, and she determined to hasten to Powis Court without losing a moment on the way.

Tomlin guessed that something unusual had happened when Lady Gertrude, who was evidently labouring under repressed excitement, ordered a few necessaries to be packed in a travelling-bag, and directed Tomlin to prepare to accompany her, while the housekeeper attended to herself.

A carriage had meanwhile been got ready, and, by dint of hard driving, a fast train was caught, which would take Lady Gertrude and her maid the greater part of their journey.

It was evening, however, before they reached Powis Court; and nothing but the extreme urgency of the case would have induced Lady Gertrude Challoner to face, at such an hour, the woman who had so frankly declared her dislike for her.

"For Gerald's sake I can bear any indignity that she can heap upon me," thought the proud, beautiful girl, as she alighted at the door of the mansion which she had left with a heart beating with love and happiness.

The footman, who of course knew her well, stared with astonishment as she told him to inform his mistress that Lady Gertrude Challoner wished to see her; but he obeyed, and a few minutes later she was standing at the door of the same room in which she had been mistaken for her cousin.

Mrs. Powis had risen from her chair, and came forward to receive her guest, but she started back as though she were looking at an apparition as she recognized her visitor.

"You! You here!" she gasped. "What is the meaning of your presence? Where is your husband?"

"I have no husband," was the reply, uttered in low, earnest tones; "I am Gertrude Challoner; you mistook her for me, and I carried on the delusion, wishing to be cared for rather on my own account than because my father was an eldest son. Now you can understand that it was Edith, and not I, who went away, and who has married Lord Dunstan. But where is Gerald; is it too late to send to him?"

"Too late!" repeated the mother; "it is, indeed, too late. He sailed in the *Glenlyon* six days ago."

"The *Glenlyon*!" repeated Gertrude, in a dazed, bewildered kind of way; "I have seen the name somewhere to-day—can it have been at the railway stations? Call Tomlin, my head is bad, I have been very ill—I—"

But she could say no more.

Her body swayed for a second or two like a young tree shaken by the wind, and if Mrs. Powis had not caught her in her arms she would have fallen.

"Poor child!" sighed the mother, looking with newly-awakened sympathy on the beautiful face of the unconscious girl; "poor child! after all she did love him."

Then she laid Gertrude upon a couch, while she summoned a servant, and then had her carried to the room which she had previously occupied, where she busied herself in trying to restore her.

So intent was she in looking after Gertrude's comfort that she did not observe the furtive, anxious looks of the servants, and she did not miss the newspapers the next morning, though they were very carefully kept out of her way.

Those about her feared the effect which the news they contained would have upon her and Lady Gertrude, and yet, sooner or later, the terrible story must be told.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE BAY OF BISCAY.

GERALD POWIS had set himself very resolutely to work after Gertrude went away.

He wanted to ascertain what his position really was, for the whole property had come to him heavily mortgaged, and he had never yet tried to ascertain with any certainty the actual amount of his income.

Nominally that income was a large one, and to all appearances he was a very wealthy man, but so many charges had to be paid out of it that thousands had dwindled to hundreds before the stream of gold could be said to flow uninterruptedly into his pockets.

Ever since the property came into his hands he had meant to investigate the details, which his steward always managed to make as intricate and irritating as possible on purpose to perplex him, and the man had been so far successful that the evil day, though often spoken of, had never yet come.

Circumstances had changed now, however. A man could not rush into matrimony with a girl who had little or no fortune without having some very clear idea as to what his own income might be; and Gerald spent several days in the company of his lawyer and his steward, examining deeds and checking whole volumes of accounts, and showing so much patient industry, and such an unexpectedly keen insight into business matters, that on the fifth day the steward disappeared, knowing only too well that his accounts would never bear such close inspection.

To make matters worse, the man took a considerable amount of ready cash away with him, and there can be no doubt that the police would soon have been set upon his track if a much heavier blow had not fallen upon Gerald Powis.

Taking up the *Times* on the morning after the steward's failure to present himself, the young man saw among the marriages two names which, coming together, sent the blood from his cheek, and made his heart seem as though it had ceased to beat.

The names were those of Lord Dunstan and

Edith Challoner, the daughter of the late Hon. George Challoner.

He read the announcement over again and then he showed it to his mother, asking her in a husky voice if she thought it could be true.

But even Mrs. Powis, with all her prejudices, could not believe that any woman could be so thoroughly heartless, and she reluctantly said so.

Indeed, she was so emphatic in her assertion that either the advertisement had been inserted as a sorry joke, or that there must be some mistake, that Gerald determined to go to the church where the marriage had been solemnized and only to trust his own eyes in accepting proof of the perfidy of the woman he so truly loved.

He went, and when he returned his mother had no need to ask the result of his journey, for the blight which had come over her son was only too apparent.

When she began to abuse the girl, however, and to try to rouse him to anger against her, he begged her to desist, saying that come what would, and be she ever so false, he could never cease to love her.

Then he shut himself up in his own rooms, and for many days even his mother did not see him.

This kind of thing could not continue, however, his constitution was too strong and his mental fibre too tough to be destroyed by a woman's perfidy, and though he would not hear one word uttered against her, nature was too strong to allow him to pine away because grief had laid her hand upon him.

But he could not live here among all the old familiar sights and sounds, which at every turn reminded him of the woman he had lost, and he one day startled his mother by saying quietly that he meant to make a voyage to New Zealand.

"New Zealand!" echoed Mrs. Powis, in supreme disgust; "can't you go farther from home than that?"

He smiled, for he could smile even though his heart was wounded even to the point of breaking, and he said,—

"Not very conveniently, mother. I don't think the shape of the earth admits of my getting very much farther from this place, but I shall come back again cured, I hope, and better able to live the life that my father lived."

"And what is to become of me meanwhile?" asked his mother, fretfully.

"You will live here, of course; I don't ask you to go with me. Indeed, I mean to rough it in the colonies, and to see if hard work won't do me some good."

"Hard work!" repeated his mother, with infinite scorn. "What hard work do you suppose you are fit for? Go and try the experiment in your own fields, trudge for but one day behind the plough, dig and delve by the side of your own labourers for one week, and then talk about curing your love-sickness by such means! I have no patience when I hear of men of your class going to the colonies to do work that they would disdain to touch at home! The sun is as hot there as it is here, and the frost of winter is equally severe. Do you suppose that a spade will be lighter to use in New Zealand than in England?"

"No, mother; but I may feel more inclined to ure it there than here," was the quiet answer. "And in any case I am going; but I will come back again if I live."

His mother tried entreaty after this, but it was all in vain. After what had happened he felt that he must go away from the old scenes or he should go mad; so his passage was taken in the fine steamship *Glenlyon*, and on the day fixed for her departure he went on board, and sailed with her.

A voyage to New Zealand in these days is a far less serious undertaking than was a journey to the Cape fifty years ago, and the *Glenlyon* was to go through the Suez Canal, and, being a fast steamer, was expected to make the trip in a very short time.

Scarcely had the ship left the Thames, however, than bad weather set in, and this increased as they went down the Channel to such an extent that the captain felt more than half inclined to put in at Plymouth until the gale abated.

The loss of time which such a course would have entailed, however, decided him to continue the voyage, so the *Glenlyon* went on her way, the weather becoming worse instead of better, until she was half way through the Bay of Biscay, when her engines became useless, for the mighty waves breaking over the deck put the fires out, and the huge steamship lay like a log in the trough of the sea.

It was a fearful time; the passengers as well as the crew took their turn at the pumps, and for two days and two nights they laboured as only men can labour who have not only their own lives to save but who have helpless women and tender children dependent upon them for safety.

But it was all in vain; the vessel was overloaded, no fire could be lighted, the water gained upon them every hour, and at last it became evident the ship was doomed.

At length the captain gave the order to lower the boats, and to put into them first of all the women and children; but many of the former who had husbands and fathers with them refused to go, for it seemed impossible that any boat could live among those mighty waves.

The first boat was filled, however, but after getting a few yards from the side of the vessel it was seen to capsize, and those left behind felt that it was better to remain where they were and wait for death than go to meet it.

So, many hours went by, and then some sailors manned another boat, and offered to take any who would come with them.

But the volunteers were few.

Most of the passengers had relatives on board, and these felt that if death were inevitable it was better to face it together where they stood than to trust themselves in an open boat to the mercy of such a tempest-tossed sea, to suffer exposure and privation, with nothing but the certainty of death at last.

There was no panic among the ill-starred throng, neither were there any excesses among them.

Many of the number spent the remaining hours of their lives in prayer; a few among tried to propitiate Heaven by promising what they would do if they were spared, reminding those who could look calmly on of Byron's lines on a similar occasion,—

"They vow to amend their lives, but yet they don't,
Because if drowned they can't, if saved they won't."

Night came down upon the scene—a fearful night!—and the men at the pumps worked on with the dull apathy of despair.

The shrieking of the wind, the roar of the waves, the constant rush of water, added to fatigue, cold, and hunger, made life so wretched that death could scarcely be more appalling; and Gerald Powis, who had been first among the passengers to lend a helping hand at the pumps, was well-nigh worn out with his exertions.

"It is quite useless working any longer," said the captain, when morning broke, and brought with it no sign of succour. "She can't keep afloat another hour. Those of you who like to take to the boats can do so; but you'll have to be quick about it!"

"It's just a chance," said the first mate to Gerald, "and we may as well try it."

Then he called several men to help him and the remaining boat was lowered, but there was no rush of people to enter it, and Gerald had declined to join the party, when, just as the boat was clearing the vessel, the captain said to our hero,—

"You'd better give yourself a chance, sir. I must stick to my ship, but you can give that to my wife if you ever reach England."

He placed a pocket-book in Gerald's hand, and gave him a slight push.

Feeling himself overbalanced, Gerald gave a leap, but fell into the sea.

He was, however, dragged into the boat by the men who had taken refuge in her, and when, a few minutes afterwards, he looked up again he saw the *Glenlyon* plunge with a shudder into her watery grave.

For three days and nights that boat, with its living freight, floated upon that wild, tempestuous sea.

The wretched men were without water or food; most of them were scantily clad, and though more than once during this time they saw ships in the distance, they had not been able to make those on board any of the vessels see them.

Accustomed to hardship and peril the sailors bore up wonderfully under this exposure to the fury of the elements, but Gerald Powis had gone through so much mental suffering before he left England that he was less able to battle with cold and hunger and raging thirst than his sturdier companions, and at the end of the fourth day he was delirious, and if the others had not restrained him he would have sprang overboard.

But even the stout hearts of the sailors began to fail them as night succeeded day and day succeeded night, and still there seemed no hope of rescue.

The storm had abated, but they had lost their oars, and they could not rig a sail of any description.

Moreover, ship after ship went by and could not or would not see them, till the poor fellows felt deserted of Heaven.

It was on the morning of the tenth day that an outward-bound vessel picked up a boat in which several men were lying asleep or senseless with exhaustion.

One young man, who was evidently not a sailor, seemed to be quite dead, and having taken the others on board the rescuers were about to wrap the dead man in an old sail and consign him to the deep, when he gave a little gasp and they saw that life was not quite extinct.

Fortunately there was a doctor on board the *Lady Mary*, and the sufferer was placed under his care, but he gave little hope of his recovery; and meanwhile the vessel sped on her way, every hour increasing the distance between herself and the white cliffs of old England.

CHAPTER VI.

TIME WORKS ITS CHANGES.

THE news of her son's death completely prostrated Mrs. Powis, and for several days she was confined to her room, refusing to be comforted.

Lady Gertrude waited upon her with the devotion of a daughter, and great and overpowering as was her own grief, she strove hard to control it so that she might soothe the mother who had lost her only son.

"It was through my folly that he went away!" moaned the heart-broken girl; "and though no grief can be greater than my grief, I must remember that his mother must now be my first care."

So she spared herself neither day nor night until the woman who had at first been inclined to reproach her as the cause of her bereavement, at length turned to her for consolation.

The great sorrow which they shared drew the hearts of these two women close together, and in trying to soften the other's grief each found a certain balm for her own aching heart.

Still, though they talked about him constantly as dead, they could neither of them realize that Gerald was lost to them for ever.

It seemed to both of them as though he had gone on a long journey from whence he would one day return, and though they had no reasonable ground for thinking he had escaped a watery grave they still tried to believe that it was possible.

A homeward-bound vessel herself nearly powerless in the fierce storm had seen the *Glenlyon* sink, and had picked up one of her boats afterwards, and it was believed that the

whole of the crew and passengers had perished with the ship herself.

Among the list of passengers as lost appeared the name of Gerald Powis of Powis Court; and not very long after this—no further news of the missing man being forthcoming—Mrs. Powis received an intimation from the nephew of her late husband to the effect that he should like to take possession of the Court as soon as she could conveniently leave it.

Here was another blow, and at the moment the strong-willed, exacting woman seemed to feel the imminent loss of her splendid home more even than the death of her son.

Lady Gertrude, however, could soften this blow. She had remained at the Court with Gerald's mother, hoping against hope that some news would come of the lost and dear one, but now, when this notice to quit came, she said, promptly,—

"Come to my house and share my home with me; if Gerald is really dead I shall never marry, and I will be a daughter to you, and you shall be my mother, as you would have been if he had lived."

Whereupon Mrs. Powis embraced the girl whom she had once said she could never like, and declared that Heaven had been merciful to her in giving her a daughter when she lost her son.

So the two ladies went to Wayford Hall and lived together, and if the arrangement was not altogether satisfactory to Mrs. Wrenshaw, who received her *congé* with a handsome addition to her quarter's salary, Miss Marsh, on the other hand, was delighted with the change—for Lady Gertrude made a point of treating Gerald's mother with all the consideration she would have received in her own house.

Lady Gertrude and her adopted mother were not well-suited to live together, for, besides the grief which they shared, they had very few ideas or sympathies in common; but, for all this, they never jarred, and never was an unkind word spoken between them—principally, it is to be feared, because when there was a chance of a divergence of opinion Gertrude invariably yielded.

Thus nearly a year went by, and Mrs. Powis, who had worn deep mourning for her son, was beginning to talk about having some less sombre garments.

"I really shall go out of mourning next week, my dear," she was saying to Gertrude; "and I think you ought to do the same. It is very sad to lose those who are dear to us, but it is useless parading one's grief to the world beyond a certain time, and I am so weary of black."

"Yes; one is apt to get weary of everything," replied Edith, despondingly, as she looked through the window at the rain, that was falling with monotonous persistence; "and it doesn't matter much what one wears!"

A servant entered at this moment, and said to Mrs. Powis,—

"A gentleman wishes to see you, ma'am."

"To see me? What name did he give?"

"He wouldn't give any name. He said it was of no consequence."

"How very peculiar. Of no consequence, indeed! Are you sure that he is a gentleman, Brown?"

"Yes, ma'am; I can't be mistaken."

"Well, show him in—that is, dear," with a glance at Gertrude, "unless you would rather I saw him in another room."

"Do as you like," was the reply. "Perhaps he wants to see you on private business."

"No man can want to see me on private business who says that his name is of no consequence," returned Mrs. Powis in her loftiest tone.

And she made a sign to the servant, who withdrew, appearing again a few minutes afterwards with a stranger, whose long beard and moustache disguised a face that would otherwise have been strangely familiar.

Gertrude was sitting in a shaded part of the room, and he did not observe her, though she sat with clasped hands and dilated eyes look

ing at him, and scarce daring to breathe till she heard the sound of his voice.

Mrs. Powis had risen to her feet, and she stood staring at the stranger, doubtful as to his identity, and yet with her heart throbbing in a manner strange to it.

"Mother!"

It was all he said, but the masterful woman fell upon his breast, sobbing with joy like the weakest of her sex.

"Gerald! my son—my son!" was all she could say.

He kissed her tenderly, and led her to the couch, for she had become suddenly faint, and for a minute or two seemed as though she was going to be hysterical.

But she conquered this weakness and began to question her son, and to tell him of all the pain she had suffered by his absence, quite forgetful of Lady Gertrude, who sat mutely looking at the joyful reunion in which she seemed to have no part.

At length she could bear the sense of so much happiness for others and so much desolation for herself no longer. Gerald evidently cared nothing for her, and his mother had forgotten her existence.

If she could only get out of the room without being observed she would go away, hide herself in some remote corner of the world, and never look upon the face of either of them again.

With a heart almost bursting with pain and a sense of neglect, even while it was throbbing with joy to know that Gerald still lived, she silently rose from her seat, and tried to reach the door by going round a portion of the large room.

She was within a couple of yards of the threshold when her dress caught in the corner of a small table, upon which were some pieces of rare china, and it fell over making a loud crash, as the precious cups and saucers were broken to atoms.

The sound startled the mother and son, and Gerald rose and came forward to help to repair the damage.

He guessed in a moment that it was Lady Gertrude Challoner who stood before him; but it was not until he looked upon her pale, agitated face that he recognized the woman whom he had so passionately loved.

"Edith!" he exclaimed, involuntarily.

"No, I am not Edith," she said, desperately. "I deceived you from the first. I am Gertrude Challoner. It was only a girl's freak, but it has brought with it its bitter retribution."

And she was leaving the room when he caught her hand, and looking into her eyes with a stern, searching gaze, he asked,—

"Can this be possible? Are you really not married?"

Lady Gertrude gave an appealing glance to Mrs. Powis; her heart was too full for her to dare to speak, lest she should break down and reveal how much she suffered.

It was terrible to feel that she was standing here to be judged by Gerald instead of being gathered to his heart, as the dearest treasure that life possessed for him.

"Yes, it is quite possible," here volunteered Mrs. Powis, quickly. "Gertrude came to me a few days after you had gone away and told me how she had taken her cousin's name, because she wanted us to love her for herself alone. I blame myself greatly for not having seen through the harmless deception; but she has been like a dear daughter to me ever since, Gerald; and now, my dear children, you must excuse me for a minute, while I go and tell poor Marsh what has happened. I will be back again directly."

And then, with more tact than she had ever before known to exhibit, Mrs. Powis left the room, probably feeling that the two young people would get on better without her.

For Gertrude a prompt renewal of the engagement between Gerald and herself would have been quite possible at this moment, for she had never ceased to love him, and if he had not returned she would always have been true to his memory.

With Gerald, however, this was not the case. The love which he had grown to regard as the bane of his life had been crushed out of his heart; he had learnt to believe the woman false and heartless who had once seemed to him the best and brightest of her sex, and such a sudden revulsion as would bring him back to the old condition of undoubting trust and fond devotion was, to a man of his temperament, quite impossible.

"I thank you sincerely for your kindness to my mother," he said, quietly, and even coldly. "I fear she has suffered greatly in my absence. When I reached England this morning I heard she was living with you, and I came on at once without making myself known to anyone."

His words chilled the loving heart of the faithful girl; but she came of a proud race, and she would have died rather than have sued to any man for his love, or asked for any mercy.

Her spirit was equal to the occasion, and with a supreme effort she stifled the agonizing pain of disappointment, and compelled herself to smile as she said, gracefully,—

"I need no thanks; your mother has been as great a comfort to me as I can have been to her. But you must be tired and hungry if you only reached England to-day; when you are refreshed you shall give us an account of your adventures. How strange that your mother and I should always have had a kind of superstitious conviction that you had escaped from the wreck!"

"I was the only passenger that did survive," he replied. "Half-a-dozen of the crew and myself are all that are left to tell the story; and we were wrecked a second time, for the ship that picked us up came to grief herself, and for many months those that were saved lived on an island inhabited only by savages."

"And that was the reason you didn't write to your mother!" said Gertrude, quickly;

"but you must excuse me for a few minutes."

And before he could utter another word she had left the room.

He was glad to be alone. He knew that Gertrude was disappointed in him, and he felt surprised at himself, for he could never have believed it possible that he could meet the woman he had once so passionately loved, and not have either taken her to his heart or turned away from her as a stranger. But he had done neither.

A word or even a glance from the girl herself might have driven him to one extreme or the other, but she had bridged the difficulty by her readiness to treat him as a mere friend, and he had accepted the situation, knowing too little of a woman's heart to be conscious that she was now further from him than she had ever been.

CHAPTER VII.

HER FINAL DECISION.

LADY GERTRUDE'S first impulse after leaving Gerald was to seek his mother, and warn her against saying anything to her son which should lead him to think that he was expected to renew his engagement with herself.

Fortunately she was not able to find Mrs. Powis at the moment, and second thoughts decided her to say nothing, but to let matters take their own natural course.

Left to herself Mrs. Powis would not be likely to do anything that was not absolutely required of her, but if she were once warned against saying certain things, she was almost sure to do what she was most desired to refrain from doing.

So Lady Gertrude gave such orders as the arrival of a guest necessitated, then she took a book and seated herself in her boudoir.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Powis, who had remained away from the drawing-room long enough as she thought, to allow the young people to express their joy at meeting, went back again and found her son alone.

He was standing at one of the windows, moodily looking out upon the rain-soaked garden, and he certainly at the moment had

anything but the appearance of a successful lover.

"I am glad you are back, mother!" he said, abruptly, as she approached him; "because I want to start for the Court to-night."

"For the Court!" echoed his mother. "Don't you know that Wyndham Powis is now in possession of Powis Court? It was when he requested me to leave the place that Gertrude offered me a home here."

"Well he will have to clear out pretty sharply!" was the prompt reply; "and I don't mean to lose any time over the matter."

"You can do nothing to-night, at any rate," urged his mother; "wait until the morning, Gertrude I am sure would wish it."

He made no answer to this, but continued to watch the rain-drops that pattered against the window, until the entrance of the butler who came to conduct him to his room decided him.

"I suppose it is of no use trying to do anything such a day as this," he said, gloomily.

Then he followed the man.

He could not very well go to the village while his mother was a guest at the Hall.

Mrs. Powis saw that something was wrong between the couple.

Her son fell into fits of silence from time to time, while there was a light in Lady Gertrude's eyes such as she had never seen there before, while the young hostess was all sparkle and wit, as though she felt it incumbent upon her to pose as the brightest and most cheerful of the party.

She had sent down to the Rectory to beg the rector to come up and dine with them; and the fourth person, who knew nothing about the hopes and fears of the rest, helped them to get over the evening without anything of an embarrassing nature being discussed.

It was not like the home-coming which Gerald had pictured, or that Gertrude had prayed for, and as she looked at the bronze and bearded man who sat at her table, and who addressed her with such careful formality, she felt that the old Gerald was indeed lost to her for ever.

The following morning Gerald started for Powis Court, and at parting Lady Gertrude reluctantly gave him her hand.

It was the first time that their hands had met since they had parted as affianced lovers twelve months ago, and both of them seemed to remember it, for while he was inclined to retain the soft hand in his clasp, she withdrew it hastily, as though the contact burnt her.

The action startled the young man and made him conscious that he was not so indifferent to the beautiful woman who had caused him so much suffering as he had tried to believe, and he looked at her quickly, with some of the old love in his eyes.

But she had turned away her head, and even had she met the glance she would not have responded to it, for he had wounded her pride, had made her feel that in mourning for him as lost she had revealed her love for him to the world; and now all those who knew of her infatuation would look upon her with pity, if not contempt, for loving a man who had long ceased to love her.

She writhed under the humiliation of feeling herself rejected, but she was too high-spirited to parade her sufferings; indeed, so well did she hide her real feelings, that Mrs. Powis, who watched her keenly, thought she had changed towards Gerald far more than he had changed towards her.

Lady Gertrude, however, had determined that as soon as the mother and son should have taken up their residence again at Powis Court, she herself would go abroad for an indefinite length of time.

The next day, Gerald Powis came back to Wayford and startled his mother with the information that his cousin refused to recognize him, and that he positively declined to give up possession of the house and estate until compelled by law to do so.

"Of course there will be no great difficulty in proving my identity," he said, in a tone of

vexation, "but it is annoying to be shut out of one's own house for all that. Am I very much changed?" he asked, turning suddenly to Lady Gertrude.

"Yes, you are changed," she replied, quietly, "though I easily recognized you, and your cousin could have no real doubt on the subject."

She dipped her pen in the ink and went on with the letter she was writing as though Gerald Powis and his affairs could have no possible interest for her.

Mrs. Powis glanced at her son, then she turned her eyes upon the girl who had been as a daughter to her, and she felt inclined to ask angrily what had come over both of them, but she restrained herself so far as to say in a tone of vexation,—

"I don't know what is going to happen, I'm sure; the world seems to have turned upside down, and everybody does just what they are least expected to do. I am out of all patience with everybody!"

And as she made this last exclamation she marched out of the room.

At any other time, Gertrude would have laughed at this exhibition of impatience, but now she tried not to notice it.

She had meant to avoid ever again being alone with Gerald, but his unexpected return and his mother's temper had upset her calculations, and she did not care to get up and leave the room as though she were afraid of him.

"I suppose that I am changed," said the young man, sadly; "mental suffering, physical pain, and exposure to the elements, such as I have experienced in the course of the last twelve months, must leave their mark behind. But you recognized me, Gertrude, and so did my mother."

"Yes, and so would anybody else if you were to shave off that beard, and dress yourself as you used to dress; but you will see that other people will recognize you even as you are. Lord Dunstan, with his wife, my cousin Edith, will be here to-morrow, and they will know you quickly enough."

"Your cousin Edith!" he said with a sigh. "If I had only known that it was she whom Dunstan had married, what torture and untold suffering it would have saved me!"

She made no answer, she was only wishing that she could escape from him without further question, or that someone would come into the room, and thus save an explanation.

Silence, however, would not satisfy him, and he asked suddenly,—

"What made you take your cousin's name?"

"It was nothing more than a sudden whim on my part," she replied; "a girlish freak, that is all. I suggested it to Edith on our way to Powis Court, and she refused to lend herself to my scheme. Your mother, however, mistook my cousin for me when she met us, and poor Edie was so mortified at the different way in which she and I were received, that she remained silent for the moment, and I carried my point; it was fun to me to be snubbed because I was supposed to be poor, and afterwards I shrank from explaining the harmless deception I had practised."

"Harmless!" he repeated, in a tone of repressed feeling. "It wrecked my happiness and almost cost me my life."

"I believed it to be harmless," she returned, not noticing his words.

"But you must have told the truth sooner or later!" he urged. "Why not, therefore, have told me your real name before you left my house?"

"I should have done so, but I thought your mother would feel so mortified and—and—I was not quite sure about yourself; it was for that reason that I would promise nothing until you came here, when I meant to tell you all; but you never came, and it was not until you had left England that I knew why you had failed to keep your word."

"You know that I took every precaution to assure myself that there could be no mistake," he said, earnestly. "That I even went to the

church where Dunstan was married, to be certain of the name of his bride, because I could not believe you would be so false to me and to yourself."

"Yes, I heard that you did so," she replied gently; "but I think I should have required stronger proof had I been you; but it is too late to talk of it now; I am very sorry for your sake and for my own that it has happened, for it has blotted with pain a whole year of our lives."

"A year, too, that should have been the happiest of our lives!" he said, regretfully.

She made no reply, but rose to leave the room; to save herself whole years of torture she would not tempt him to breathe again to her one word of love.

"Gertrude!" he said, as he came forward and looked down upon her lovely face. "Gertrude, can you forgive me for not being as glad to see you yesterday as—"

"As I was to see you," she said, finishing the sentence for him, and looking at him with flashing eyes. "Yes, I can quite forgive you, Mr. Powis; it was natural that I who had regarded you as dead should be more glad to welcome you living than you who only thought me married should be to see me. But let us forget the past!" she continued, changing her tone, and trying to speak in a lighter strain; "it must be unpleasant to you, and it is humiliating to me; henceforth we will be simple friends!"

"That can never be," he said, resolutely. The feeling that he was in danger of losing her roused the dormant passion which had only slumbered in his heart, and now he was as eager to call her his own as she was unwilling to be won.

"We must be more than friends, Gertrude, or less, for I love you, and if you will not become my wife I shall never willingly look upon your face again."

"That is a pity!" she retorted, coldly, "for I am in no humour to marry anyone."

And so saying, she would have passed him and left the room had he not stood in her way; and clasping one of her hands, asked in low, earnest tones,—

"Is this your final decision, Gertrude? Am I to go, taking this for my answer? Is life henceforth to be to us as though we had never met?"

If she could have escaped from him without meeting his eyes she would have done so, but this was impossible.

The happiness of their lives was at stake, and he would be satisfied with nothing less than her absolute acceptance or refusal of his love.

She lifted her eyes, pride and wounded self-esteem giving her momentary strength; but as she met the fond, loving gaze of the man who was dearer to her than all the world besides, her obstinacy melted like snow in the warm rays of the sun, and she was unresistingly clasped to the manly breast, which but for her own folly would long ere this have been her rightful resting-place.

The next day, when Lord and Lady Dunstan came to the Hall, they were as much surprised as delighted to meet their old friend, though they were blissfully ignorant that their hasty marriage had been the cause of his great peril and lengthened sufferings; for Gertrude had kept her own counsel and had never told them what the indulgence of her whim had cost her, and the man with whom her life was henceforth to be spent.

It is only necessary to add that Mr. Wyndham Powis soon became convinced of his cousin's identity, and reluctantly retired from Powis Court, where Gerald's mother speedily reinstated herself.

By Lady Gertrude's desire the old lady is still mistress here, and when her son and his wife come to visit her it is as her guests—a pleasing fiction which helps to sweeten the last years of her life.

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

WHAT is it that ties two persons, but touches only one of them? A wedding-ring.

POLICEMAN (to drunken husband)—"How dare you beat your wife in this manner? She is under the protection of the law, and the right to punish belongs to the law exclusively." D. H.—"All right, you lick her."

THE story is told of a minister who said, when one of his flock wept over the financial deficit in connection with a Christian enterprise, "My dear friend, never mind the tears; this thing cannot be run by water."

GOLDMARK, the Viennese composer, introduced himself one day to a good-looking young lady sitting opposite him in a railway coupé: "My name is Goldmark; I am the composer of the 'Queen of Sheba.'" "Ah," replied the young lady, "what a remunerative position that must be!"

A LITTLE boy of three years, whose mother played the organ in church, and who was obliged to be left in the care of others, was asked one Sunday morning what his kitten was crying so piteously for. "I don't know said he, "but 's'pect the old cat has gone to church."

A MAN made a wager with a lady that he could thread a needle quicker than she could sharpen a lead-pencil. The man won—time fourteen minutes and forty seconds. It is thought the result would have been different if the woman had not run out of lead-pencil inside of five minutes.

THE following story is told of a distinguished Edinburgh professor:—Desiring to go to church one wet Sunday he hired a cab. On reaching the church-door he tendered a shilling—the legal fare—to the cabby, and was somewhat surprised to hear the cabman say, "Twa shillin', sir." The professor, fixing his eye on the extortioner, demanded why he charged two shillings, upon which the cabman drily answered, "We wish to discourage travelling on the Sawbath as much as possible, sir."

"CHARLIE," remarked Fogg, "you are born to be a writer." "Ah!" replied Charlie, blushing slightly at the compliment, "you have seen some of the things I have turned off?" "No," said Fogg; "I wasn't referring to what you had written; I was simply thinking what a splendid ear you had for carrying a pen. Immense, Charlie; simply immense."

"Look out!" exclaimed a man over whose face a barber was moving his razor; "you are cutting off my moustache." "You didn't tell me not to cut it," the barber replied. "With me a man must always specify." "All right," said the customer. When the barber had finished, the man arose from the chair, approached the artist, and gave him a violent kick. "Look out, you are kicking me!" howled the barber. "You didn't tell me not to kick you. With me a man must always specify."

THE injudicious use of metaphors has occasionally created great amusement both in the old Irish and English Houses of Commons. The other night Mr. Callan, Member of Parliament for Louth, a staunch opponent of the Sunday Closing and Permissive Bill, and personally a great benefactor to the revenue, replying to the Attorney-General, said: "The facts relied on by the learned gentlemen are very strange. Now, Mr. Speaker, I swallow a good deal. ('Hear, hear!' 'Quite true,' 'Begorra you can,' and roars of laughter.) I repeat, I can swallow a great deal ('Hear, hear,' and fresh volleys of laughter), but I can't swallow that." A few nights before, in a debate which had to do with the Jews, Baron de Worms had just remarked, "We owe much to the Jews," when there came a feeling groan from a well-known member in his back corner, "We do."

SOCIETY.

THE luxury in parasols in Paris has reached an exceptional point. Paintings on silk, by even eminent artists, are used.

THE DUKE AND DUCHESS OF ALBANY have definitely arranged to pay a visit to Marlborough College on Monday, July 23. The municipality will present an address of welcome to their Royal Highnesses on their arrival, and the Duke and Duchess will witness the presentation of prizes to the students, and subsequently attend a concert in the evening. The Royal visitors will be entertained by the Master at the Lodge, and will leave Marlborough in the course of the following day.

THE PRINCE OF WALES having decided that Prince Albert Victor shall reside within the college precincts, residential chambers, which are being beautifully furnished, have been taken for him in Trinity College, Cambridge. The Prince of Wales thinks that by so doing the education of his son will be better looked after. It may be remembered that when H.R.H. was at Cambridge himself he lived outside the College, a plan which for some reason or other does not commend itself to him as regards his son.

It is not very surprising, says *Society*, that the Queen's condition has not materially improved during her stay in Scotland. Nothing seems to interest Her Majesty, who appears to be entirely given over to a melancholia which is not a satisfactory symptom in any member of the Guelph family. A singular and significant feature of the Queen's indisposition is that, in speaking of current topics, Her Majesty has lately given her utterances the morbid tone of speaking of herself in the past tense, as though she had already abdicated, or—worse.

THE marriage of Mr. Hugh Oliver Northcote, son of the Right Hon. Sir Stafford H. Northcote, Bart., M.P., to Miss Edith Livingstone Fish, youngest daughter of the Hon. Hamilton Fish, of New York, was celebrated on the 6th ult., at St. Philip's in the Highlands. The bride was accompanied to the altar by eight bridesmaids attired in white. The best man was Mr. A. Baring, and he was accompanied by four groomsmen. A special train in the morning conveyed the numerous friends of the bride and bridegroom from New York to Glenclyffe, the beautiful residence of the bride's father, where an elegant breakfast was served on their arrival, and returned with the visitors at a late hour.

THOUGH not generally becoming, the "Henri Deux" hats were much worn at Ascot. One, of black straw, with crocus-coloured velvet and plumes of feathers, was very striking, worn with a costume of black satin, trimmed with many rows of the same coloured velvet ribbon. Another, of white straw and velvet, with gold-tipped feathers, was worn with a cape, high on the shoulders, of magnificent cut velvet brocade on cloth of gold ground. Bonnets, mostly of the basket variety, were profusely decorated with clusters of fruit—apples, plums, oranges, grapes, cherries, and walnuts were all seen; while a large bunch of ripe tomatoes and leaves ornamented a bonnet composed entirely of green beads. It is impossible to particularize fully the many beautiful toilettes worn, but the following are among the most noteworthy, and give a good idea of the prevailing modes. Har-ony of colour and completeness of detail were everywhere noticeable, and no violent contrasts, with few exceptions, were to be seen, the especially trying shades of *fruits écrasés* being conspicuously absent among the well-dressed throng. Few large checks were worn, and a decided preference shown for self-coloured materials in pale shades of brown, steel grey, blue and pink.

STATISTICS.

CHAMPAGNE.—An interesting report on the trade in champagne, or presumed champagne, has been published in Paris. According to this, 23,000,000 bottles of champagne are exported annually in the following proportions:—"Africa, 100,000 bottles; Spain, 300,000 bottles; Belgium, 500,000; Italy, 500,000; Holland, 600,000; Germany, 1,500,000; Russia, 2,000,000; England, 5,000,000; Northern America, 10,000,000. The consumption in France is valued at £2 500,000. During the last two years a considerable amount of the champagne was manufactured from Italian grapes. The exportation of grapes from Italy will be, judging from contracts made with great exporters, very large. Waggoners have been specially built in Milan to convey the grapes direct from the Italian provinces to the wine manufacturing districts of France.

DURATION OF LIFE.—Of the whole population on the globe it is estimated that 90,000 die every day, about 3,700 every hour, and sixty every minute, or one every second. These losses are more than counterbalanced by the number of births. The married are longer lived than the single. The average duration of life in all civilized countries is greater now than in any anterior period. Macaulay, the distinguished historian, states that in the year 1885, not an unhealthy year, the deaths in England were as one to ten; but in 1850, one to forty. Dupin, a well-known French writer, states that the average duration of life in France, from 1776 to 1843, increased fifty-two days annually. The rate of mortality in 1781 was one in twenty-two, but in 1820 one in forty. The rich men live on an average forty-two years, but the poor only thirty years.

GEMS.

Our fellow-creatures can judge of what we are only from what we do; but in the eye of our Maker what we do is of no worth except as it flows from what we are.

Our happiness depends less upon the art of pleasing than upon a uniform disposition to please. The difference is that which exists between ceremony and sincerity.

It does not follow that you must do a mean thing to a man who does a mean thing to you. The old proverb runs—"Because the cur has bitten me, shall I bite the cur?"

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SAUCE FOR BEEFSTEAK.—Mix two teaspoonfuls of French mustard with two teaspoonfuls of Worcester sauce, a tablespoonful of butter, a wineglassful of white wine; make it all quite hot, and serve with beefsteak.

CELERY SAUCE.—Cut up some celery quite small, and boil it in water; add sufficient milk to make the sauce with a pat of butter, add pepper and salt to taste, boil until quite hot in a tin saucepan (iron saucepan will turn it black), and serve with boiled fowls, rabbit, or turkey.

IRISH STEW is an economical dish, yet it is not everyone who thinks of making the stew of the remains of a joint; that is to say, of the bone when nearly all the meat has been taken from it. Cut the meat off in as neat pieces as may be, fat and lean together. Break up the bone and put it with the meat, then put all into a saucepan with plenty of sliced onion, twice as much raw potato peeled and sliced, and cold water or stock to cover. Simmer all gently for two or three hours, season liberally with pepper and salt, and serve in a soup tureen. If necessary, a little flour may be added to thicken the stew, but it is probable that this will not be required.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A LIFE OF LABOUR.—If the truth could be generally appreciated that a life of labour is, in its highest form, a life of pleasure, that not only is it sweetened by the hope of recompense, but by the actual delight of exerting the powers to the utmost, and of seeing the work grow and improve under our hands, there would be a transformation in our industries. The joy of excellence once tasted would not willingly be resigned, and poor, inefficient work would be at a discount, not merely in the price it could command, but in the actual pleasure of performance.

CONVERSATION.—The topics and tone of conversation might be in many families far more intelligently guided. Parents ought to study the art of interesting their children in noble and inspiring themes. If the ordinary and daily talk at the table and in the drawing-room be sordid and selfish, or snarling, or only gossip, or about potatoes and cabbage, what can one expect of the children's minds and hopes? When will parents learn that their words are seed-corn, and will bear a future harvest, each after its own kind. Heroes and saints are made by talking of heroism and sainthood, just as the merchants and farmers are by talking of commerce and agriculture.

A WOMAN will turn at last, and animals higher in the scale of creation too. Women, who have been so long lectured by men on the foolishness and unhealthiness of their dress, have at length betought themselves that men's clothes are after all not quite perfection, and so a pleasing variety has been given to the rather stale discussions on the rational dress question. Men's hats are a monstrosity, men's coats are too short and too thin, and so on through the whole catalogue of man's vestments. The doctors, too, are taking up these arguments, and are at once endorsing the statement that men's clothes are capable of improvement from a hygienic point of view.

CHILDREN'S TEMPER.—Some children are more prone to show temper than others, and sometimes on account of qualities which are valuable in themselves. For instance, a child of active temperament, sensitive feeling, and eager purpose is more likely to meet with constant jars and rubs than a dull, passive child; and, if he is of an open nature, his inward irritation is immediately shown in bursts of passion. If you repress these ebullitions by scolding and punishment, you only increase the evil by changing passion into sulkiness. A cheerful, good-tempered tone of your own, a sympathy with his trouble, whenever the trouble has arisen from no ill-conduct, are the best antidotes; but it would be better still to prevent beforehand, as much as possible, all sources of annoyance. Never fear spoiling children by making them happy.

THE HANDKERCHIEF.—Nothing is more curious in the history of pocket handkerchiefs than the period when French women were supposed to be innocent of the existence of such an article, its name being tabooed in polite conversation, while it was beyond the daring of an actor or actress to exhibit a handkerchief on the stage, however fearful the dramatic situation might be. Mlle. Duchesnois was brave enough to break the rule by carrying a handkerchief in her hand, but when the exigencies of the scene compelled an allusion to the obnoxious piece of cambric, she spoke of it as a "light tissue;" and years afterwards cries of indignation assailed the utterance of the awful word in one of De la Vigne's adaptations of Shakespeare. Josephine, the empress, brought this to an end. She had bad teeth, and, to hide them, adopted the custom of carrying a small square handkerchief bordered with costly lace, which she was constantly raising to her lips. The ladies of the court imitated this, and the handkerchief was elevated to the important position it has ever since maintained in the feminine toilet.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

P. S.—Aurora means the "dawn."
 P. V.—Saturday is named after Saturn.
 BELLA.—Next bank holiday will be the 6th of August.
 PENNY WISE.—We cannot recommend any German lotteries.
 F. D. B. R.—Write to Captain St. John Mildmay, National Rifle Association, Pall Mall.
 W. F. T.—Cornell University is in the United States. Newnam and Gorton are ladies' colleges.
 S. P. T.—Arthur means a strong man. Emma a nurse. Alice a princess.
 ALMERIA F.—The circulation of the blood is defective. Avoid all excitement, live well, and take gentle exercise.
 S. M.—We cannot enter into religious or political discussions in this column.
 P. B. D.—Any lawyer would take up the case and make the fellow pay richly for his conduct.
 S. R.—Morally you were perhaps justified, but you had no right to take the law into your own hands.
 R. M. D.—Take the picture to a well-known and respectable dealer.
 IDA J.—1. Writing very fair, but other accomplishments would be required. 2. Hair dark brown.
 L. M.—You are suffering probably from neuralgia, the result of debility, and should consult a medical man.
 DORA.—"Esto quod esse videris" is a well-known Latin expression, meaning "Be what you seem to be."
 J. W.—There are several ball-room guides published at a very small price. Any bookseller could obtain one for you.
 MAT.—1. About the same rate as in England, but the comforts are not so well attended to. 2. A lady can live here.
 IDA.—The lady would probably be called a brunette, and would be pretty if the features were tolerably regular and the expression good.
 EDWARD R.—You are a yearly tenant and must give six months' notice to quit, terminating at the date on which you entered into possession of the premises.
 ELENA D.—Gloves should always be worn by ladies in the street, and on dress occasions within doors at an evening.
 DELTA.—Goodwood Races were established by the then Duke of Richmond in his park, near Chichester, in 1802. They are run the last week in July.
 A. P. D.—Fans are of very ancient date, existing long before the Christian era. Some very ancient Egyptian fan-handles are exhibited in the British Museum.
 HATTIE.—1. Plaster of Paris mixed with water till of the consistency of paste will fix the metal-top of your mustard-pot on to the glass. 2. Good writing.
 SEMPER FIDELIS.—The engagement rings and presents are usually and most properly returned on both sides when the wedding is broken off.
 A. E. J.—Send him an invitation in the ordinary form requesting the honour as well as pleasure of his company at the wedding, giving the time and place.
 W. T. R.—Leave the young man a little to himself. A little judicious coolness will soon bring a lover to his senses. He really does seem to care for you.
 PERCY F.—Glycerine was discovered by the famous chemist, Scheele, and by him named the "sweet principle of fate," being extracted by him from fatty substances.
 ELLEN R.—Third parties are proverbially incapable of entering into disputes between man and wife, and we must respectfully decline to enter into the matter in the way suggested.
 J. E. H.—You can take a degree very cheaply at the University of London, if you have the necessary perseverance and ability. Write to the Registrar, Burlington Gardens, W., London, for a copy of the Regulations.
 BEATY.—A pleasant looking young lady, looks about nineteen, but photographs are deceptive. As an eminent artist once remarked, they award "justice without mercy."
 POLLIE B.—Being under age the contract is not binding on you, and you can leave without notice, but if you were to be guilty of such a trick you would not be very likely to get so good a place again.
 P. L. R.—The very best thing to sweeten the breath is the concentrated solution of chloride of soda—ten drops in a wine glass of water every morning after performing the usual morning ablutions.
 ELTON.—Water has been proved to be composed chemically of the two gases, oxygen and hydrogen, but as found in nature it contains also several salts in solution, the chief of which is sulphate of lime.
 A. BEATY.—The internal arrangements of the house belong entirely to the wife, and no good ever resulted from unnecessary interference. Let a man keep to his own province, and assist his wife to do the same, and the wheels of the household will move in harmony without any jarring or rumbling. If you will endeavour to study your wife's happiness, without yielding to her caprices, you will not be likely to gain the reputation of quarrelsomeness.

M. F. P.—Yellow roses or scarlet are most becoming to a brunette, who, if she has a good colour, should select the former; if pale the latter.

HOPE DEFERRED.—It is no use to try and force matters. You must wait the turn of events and wait the result. Shakespeare, you know, says—"How poor are they that have not patience!" Do not you come under the ban.

FRED.—Your duty is simply to mind your own business and not meddle with other people's affairs. If you should interfere in the matter, it is not likely that either of the parties interested would ever forgive you.

H. W. F.—It would be best for you to learn a trade. If you have any prospect of starting in business for yourself you may stick to the grocery business, and become familiar with it.

G. B.—You should have been more bold, and proposed to the lady in person. It is never wise to write on such a matter. You should go directly to the lady and tell her that you love her, and ask her to marry you.

ALMA.—There is no actually prescribed costume for a bridegroom; but the happy man usually wears a morning frock coat, white waistcoat, light tie, light trousers, and lavender kid gloves, and also indulges in the luxury of a new hat.

DENNIS F.—Telegraphic communication was first established between England and America on the 5th August, 1858, when messages were interchanged between the Queen and the President of the United States; but it was not until 1866 that perfect success was obtained.

AMINE R.—If your sweetheart is such a thoroughly good fellow do not let difference of opinion about such a trifle keep you apart. "Bear and forbear" is a good maxim to take you through life without too much friction.

R.—Be more attentive and affectionate. Pay no attention to your rival. Invite her to accompany you to places of amusement, and make her trifling presents. Above all, propose and become engaged, and marry as soon as possible. If you are sufficiently enterprising you are certain to win her.

UNRENT.

Oh, when the heart is full of strange unrest
 With idle cares, which reason cannot bind,
 And all the world seems faithless or unkind,
 The fancy wanders on in eager quest
 Of realms where there is nothing to molest
 The brilliant visions of the dreamy mind!
 And it is sweet, if but in dreams we find
 A balm to soothe the longings of the breast,
 And thus for each, when weary and forlorn,
 And all the words of love are comfortless,
 Within the far, dim future, yet unborn,
 An Eden of the heart springs up to bless
 Yet, fad alone shall ever hail the morn
 Which brings a day of perfect happiness.

C. H. U.

W. E.—We cannot assist you. Our advice to you is to go to work at teaching, or as a companion in a good family. Those are places where you can earn a good living and enjoy comfort and protection if you will sacrifice your pride and restless desires. You can never become an actress.

PERCY W.—1. A gentleman on horseback, who sees that a lady wishes to stop him, will dismount and walk by her side, leading his horse, for there are few occasions on which it is permissible to stand while talking in the street. 2. A lady may permit a gentleman who is walking with her to carry any very small parcel that she has, but never more than one.

S. D. R.—You are a very good specimen of that detestable creature a male flirt, and must not grumble, now that you are found out, of being shunned by the girls you have flirted with. Plausible manners and a fluent tongue may get along very well for a while, but truthfulness and straightforward dealing must win in the long run.

CARINA MIA.—1. The Italian proverb "Tal padrone, tal servitore" means "Like master, like man," and is applicable in many countries. 2. "Dolce far niente" means "It is sweet to do nothing," which may suit lazy Italians, but to energetic English people doing nothing is one of the most difficult things imaginable.

ESTHER W.—The lines occur in Sir Walter Scott's "Lord of the Isles"—

"There's many a shaft at random sent,
 Finds mark the archer little meant,
 And many a word at random spoken,
 Can soothe or wound the heart that's broken."

F. R. N.—If you are under age (as the calling yourself a boy indicates) you could not make an arrangement with anybody that would be legally binding on you, though it would be on them. Your father, if he is living, should make the arrangement, or bargain, for you. If you have no father, then you should choose a guardian, and have him legally appointed, so that he could make an arrangement in your behalf that would be good in law.

W. R. S.—Nobody can teach you to be an actor. You can be taught elocution, but the art of acting you will have to learn by a long and laborious apprenticeship. You will at first have to take subordinate parts, work hard on small pay, and be snubbed in a ruthless manner. After years of such drudgery you may be advanced to something better, if you possess genuine talent, or you may be told that you had better give up the idea of being an actor altogether, as you have no gifts in that direction.

X. P. W.—A French billion is a thousand million, which is expressed in figures thus: 1,000,000,000. An English billion is a million million, which is written thus: 1,000,000,000,000. The Rothschilds are supposed to be worth from two hundred millions to six hundred millions of pounds sterling. But these amounts are conjectural, as nobody outside of the family has any knowledge on the subject; and one of the Rothschilds is reported to be fond of saying that he does not believe that even any of the family knows what they are worth.

D. J. B.—There is a little misconception as to how the law stood before the passing of Lord Lyndhurst's Act in 1835. Before that time marriages with a deceased wife's sister were not void but voidable, that is, could be set aside by the decision of a court of law, but were not absolutely illegal in themselves. The Act legalized all such marriages up to the date of the passing of the Act, but made them prospectively illegal. It is premature to say exactly how the new Act, if it becomes law, will operate, as it is sure to be altered in its progress through both Houses.

ALINE.—After an interchange of cards the acquaintance drops, unless followed by an invitation upon one side or the other. When a first invitation is not accepted, and no reason is given for it other than that expressed in the usual form of regret, the invitation ought not to be repeated. Among the people of the highest cultivation it is binding to show one's appreciation of a first invitation by a cordial acceptance, if one desires to keep the acquaintance, and by allowing nothing that can be controlled to prevent one from going. Still, circumstances may be such as to make it impossible, and then an informal note of explanation is courteous.

NANCY LEE.—There does not seem to be anything for your niece to do except to await the unfolding of events. An inexperienced young man sometimes gets into such a state of semi-lunacy as seems to have come upon your nephew, but it usually passes off after a while and leaves its victim in a very penitent mood. The rich and beautiful young lady who has so bewitched him may be a coquette, who is merely flirting with him because she has nothing else to do just now. If that is so, he will soon find out the truth, and be glad to take refuge from his mortification in the faithful love of your niece—if, indeed, she should care to receive back such a weak and unworthy lover and again confide in him.

REPUBLICAN.—It is doubtful if the simultaneous execution of all the monarchs in the world would now occasion such a sensation as the execution of Charles I. did at the time. In that day the "divine right of kings" was believed in almost universally. Charles was in very fact believed to be "the Lord's anointed." To lay hands on him was supposed to be sacrilege of the deepest dye. It was actually believed up to the last moment that an interposition of Divine Providence would prevent his execution, and for years afterwards millions of people lived in expectation of an exhibition of Divine wrath on account of what they called his martyrdom.

DORA J.—1. By meritorious services a private is occasionally raised from the ranks to the position of a corporal or sergeant, although in times of peace promotion in any of the grades is very slow. 2. The question is a very delicate one, and we prefer to leave it to the judgment of the contracting parties. Such marriages have taken place, but in the majority of instances have not proved as happy as should be, for the simple reason that the parties are too closely related by blood. 3. Your handwriting is not as plain as it should be on account of the large amount of flourishes made, which are quite unnecessary, and mar the general appearance of any one's writing.

A. N.—1. The estimated population of the Chinese Empire is 374,625,000. 2. You probably refer to the "Great Wall," or, as it is called in the Chinese language, "Wan-li-chung" (myriad-mile-wall), which was built by the first emperor of the Tsin dynasty, about 220 B.C., as a protection against the Tartar tribes. The length of this great barrier is 1,250 miles; including a parapet of 5 feet, the total height is 20 feet; thickness at the base, 25 feet; at the top, 15 feet. Towers occur at intervals of about 100 yards. These are 40 feet square at the base, and 30 feet at the summit, which is 37 feet, and in some instances 48 or 50 feet, from the ground.

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